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"THE BEAUTIFUL HEAD SINKS ON HIS BREAST, SUBDUED."

A Loyal Lover; or, The Last of the Grimspeths.

BY ARABELLA SOUTHWORTH.

CHAPTER I.

THE QUEEN OF THE NIGHT.

NOTWITHSTANDING the heat, San Carlo, the Grand Opera House of Naples, was crowded to suffocation. All the boxes were full; and from

tier above tier gleamed out a sea of human faces, turned in silent attention toward the stage.

Scarcely was the attraction due to their favorite yet somewhat hackneyed opera, "La Traviata;" but rather to the appearance of the young and popular *prima donna*, Leonora Beltani, who had taken all Naples by storm when she made her *debut* some three weeks since. With her fresh, glorious voice and magnificent stage presence, she at once became the idol, the pet of the easy-going Neapolitans, who now showered upon her frequent and unusual bursts of applause.

Forward and alone, in a box on a level with the stage, leaned a hand-

some young Englishman. Every other minute his opera-glass was leveled in the most undisguised fashion at the fair singer, who, on her part, allowed her dark, glowing eyes to wander now and then to the box, in a manner which, though unnoticeable by the audience, showed that she was not indifferent to its occupant's persistent gaze.

When the curtain had fallen at the end of the first act, he quitted his box, and made his way "behind the scenes," passing the stage doorkeeper with the nod of a privileged person.

He entered a large and brilliantly-lighted saloon, at the end of which sat the "Queen of the Night," surrounded by a crowd of worshippers. Dark, lustrous eyes, with a latent, velvety glitter in them; a profusion of hair, black as the raven's plumage, swept back in glossy waves from her white, haughty brow; a stately, yet exquisitely rounded form; and lips on whose fine curves sat a proud expression, in deep accord with that of her other features. It was a face of wild beauty—one of those for which men have run mad from all time.

She welcomed him with a smile of quiet indulgence, and then he took his stand at her side, and listened in silence to the lavish praises of her many admirers.

Occasionally she turned and made a remark or two to him; but he merely nodded in reply. He seemed quite content to stand there and watch the play of her superb features, and drink in the music of her low, rich tones.

A little apart from the group, unheeded, were two gentlemen, in evening dress, talking beneath their breath.

"Who is he? Do you know anything of him?" inquired one.

"Oh, yes. He is a young Englishman of wealth and rank. He has excellent introductions in Naples. I met him last month at the ball of the Countess Pascoli; but lately he has been at the Opera every night almost, and has withdrawn himself from all society."

"And by his assurance, hopes to carry off the beautiful Leonora."

The call came that the curtain was going up for the second act, and the assemblage dispersed.

As the young Englishman was returning to his box, a dark figure glided out from behind the stage door, in mask and mantle, hovered behind him a moment or so unperceived, as if seeking to know his features, and then disappeared.

After the great scene in the last act, among the flowers that were showered down on the favorite *prima donna*, and with which she loaded the arms of the little ungainly tenor at her side, came two bouquets from the young Englishman's box, which she retained herself with special grace.

When the curtain had descended for the last time, he met her as she was leaving the stage, and accompanied her to the door of her dressing-room.

"Don't be long, my darling," he murmured, pressing her little hand. "My carriage is in waiting; and send for me in the saloon."

She gave him a quick, fond look with her dark eyes, and entered her room.

As he sauntered away, the masked figure hovered behind him again for a moment, but quite unnoticed.

Presently the summons came, and he made his way along the now darkened passages, and conducted the beautiful cloaked woman on his arm out into the soft night air, and into a handsome open carriage, which was soon rolling over the smooth road.

For a few moments they were silent, and then he asked, "What is it you are thinking of, dearest?"

"I was hoping Annina would have something nice for supper. This first evening that you have come to sup at my little dwelling, my Ralph, I could wish to impress you favorably with its hospitality."

He smiled down on her, much amused.

"Heartless monster I should be, to think of

supper for one instant while in the presence of my heart's idol!"

"Your heart's idol is not such an ethereal being, my Ralph," she returned, with a low laugh. "I must confess to thinking of my supper."

They were passing now under the shadow of trees, and the air was heavy with the rich perfume of flowers.

The carriage came to a standstill before a little picturesque villa, gayly lighted from within, and they descended and entered together.

It was a one-storied, square house, deeply embosomed in its foliage. A balcony ran along the back of it, onto which the upper windows opened.

The lights from the supper-room streamed forth brightly into the night, together with murmured words and laughter; and presently the beautiful Italian and her young guest came out, and seated themselves on the balcony.

There was no moon, but the heavens were cloudless; and from beneath trellised arches, about which the vine-leaves clustered lovingly, they could gaze out over the gloom-wrapt terraces and lawns of the suburb, at the dark blue heaving bosom of the bay, slumbering in its waveless peace beneath the dim starlight.

"And when, my Leonora, shall our wedding take place?" he asked, bending over her tenderly; "in a fortnight, surely, or less?"

She made a little gesture of impatience with her fair hand.

"Not so soon! Think of all my young years spent in that gloomy castle of my father's; of those desperate days of warfare that followed, through which my father lost his life, and his estates were confiscated! And then think of my present days—freed from bondage; how few they have been, yet how swiftly and brightly they pass! Oh, do not hurry me, Ralph!"

"Ah, I see! You think it will be entering into another hard bondage," muttered the young Englishman, moving back a little.

"No, no; I did not mean that!" she exclaimed, eagerly. "It would be a sweeter bondage, my Ralph! Do you doubt my words? Have I not refused wealth, and rank, and fame among my countrymen to become your wife; and for your sake learned to love that cold English home you will take me to? Ah, you must believe me!"

And she put out a little jeweled hand caressingly, and drew him toward her.

But down below in the shrubbery was a dark form crouching, that ground its teeth and breathed a curse beneath its breath as it listened.

"Then we will wait a little longer," said the Englishman. "And we will not go at once to my 'cold English home,' as you term it. We will linger awhile by your own beautiful Lake Como, and after that we can tarry for a little dissipation in gay Paris. I suppose you will choose Annina to attend you? Why such a deep sigh, love?"

"Oh, it is nothing, Ralph. Yes; Annina must go with me, and her old husband, Jacopo. I could not do without them."

A little longer they talked in whispers beneath the quiet starlight, and then the young Englishman rose and took his leave.

She sat on there in deep musing, and presently the sound of carriage-wheels announced her guest's departure.

She was startled from her reverie by a rustling in the shrubberies below.

"Who's there?" she cried, rising hastily, and looking over the balcony.

But all was quiet; and the lawn, with its fringing of dusky bushes, was only just discernible in the dim light.

She entered the room from which the lights shone, and rung a little handbell on the table.

An old woman speedily appeared in answer to the summons. She had that yellow, wrinkled complexion peculiar to Neapolitan women after a certain age.

"I feel lonely and frightened, Annina.

Come and talk to me," said the fair *prima donna*, with that familiarity of manner toward her nurse that prevails in Italy as much to-day as in the times of the ill-fated "Juliet Capulet."

And the same garrulity and love of hearing her own tongue seemed to possess the old Annina, judging by her eager compliance, as pertained to the ancient nurse of Juliet.

"You are sad, my lady. What troubles you? A little love-quarrel, perhaps? These young English are very cold. Yet a right loyal gallant is he," pursued the dame, thinking of the gold pieces that from time to time had lined her old palm.

"No; he is well enough," was the impatient reply.

"I fear me you do not forget the wretched Stephano yet, lady."

"Ah, how fond he was! Those were days of happiness, Annina!" And she sighed. "But that is all passed, and it is better so. My Ralph is handsome, and I love him—yet not like I did Stephano!"

"But that Stephano—what a man! A brigand! I shudder to think of him!"

"Not an ordinary brigand, Annina. You forget—he was of noble blood. And then he was so brave—so daring! He was their leader. His word was law."

The old dame shook her head, muttering to herself as she noticed how her young lady fired up in the defense.

"You are silly to-night, Annina, to remind me of these things! There! it is very late; the morning will be here soon. Let me go to rest."

And they quitted the balcony.

All is hushed and quiet, as the young Englishman is driven along the Chiaja toward his hotel, more in the heart of the city.

But, behind them comes the quick clang of other horses' hoofs in a gallop, and the driver turns in his seat uneasily, and the young Englishman rouses himself, for the streets of Naples in the small hours of the morning are not the best guarded streets in the civilized world. On they come—two riders, evidently—far out-speeding the slow-jogging carriage on the rough road. In another instant one of them has darted past the carriage, has seized the driving-rein close to the horses' heads, and, with an experienced hand, has pulled them up almost on their haunches, to the utter despair and horror of the Italian coachman, who simply crosses himself, and sits cowed on his box.

The Englishman springs up wrathfully, to find himself confronted by the other horseman at the side of the carriage, masked, and with a gleaming dagger in his hand.

The horseman makes a dire blow at the Englishman with his weapon. It is parried on the mantled arm, though the steel cuts through and drips blood, and the next moment the vengeful wrist is grasped with an iron gripe, and the mask torn from the would-be assassin's face. Blazing eyes, and fierce, handsome features, distorted with passion, glare down on the Englishman, and then the terrible iron gripe is on the throat, and, with a deep muttered English curse, the horseman is hurled to the ground.

Springing to the box, and wresting the whip from the trembling driver's fingers, he lashes the horses, notwithstanding the leveled pistol of the other horseman, and they break away with a mad rush. A sharp report, a whizzing bullet, and down rolls the driver, with a yell of death-agony, onto the footboard. On they tear, to meet a body of the indolent Neapolitan guard turning out to inquire into the nature of the disturbance. As usual, too late, for the murder was done, and the murderer had vanished.

CHAPTER II.

LOVE AND MADNESS.

FOUR months have elapsed, and the scene is at Lake Como. It is autumn, and the glowing

tints of summer are toned down, and the luxuriant foliage is donning its mellow garb of departure, in russet brown and pale yellow.

A charming rural villa looks out over the deep-blue waters of the lake, and from its white walls a smooth lawn slopes down almost to the water's edge. It is not long past noon; the sun is in mid-heaven, and the young Englishman is pacing up and down on the shady side of the lawn, with his beautiful newly-married wife on his arm.

"I am not well to-day, Ralph," she says, languidly. "You must ask your friend, the Count, to excuse me this afternoon."

"Nay; I will send word to the Count that we cannot accompany his party to-day, and will remain with you," he answers, warmly.

"Do not stay for my sake; I shall be very poor company. Besides, all I need is rest and quiet, my Ralph. I have such a strange feeling here—and here!" putting her little hands to her forehead.

"You would rather be left alone, perhaps, love?"

"Alone with you, of course, signor," she returns, looking up at him coquettishly. "But still, you must go; it would be such a shame to disappoint the poor, dear Count. And I shall lie on a couch all the afternoon, with only Annina for my companion."

They are talking in Italian, for she has not yet learnt sufficient of his own language to hold converse in it fluently.

When staying at Milan, some twelvemonth since, the young Englishman had made acquaintance with the Count De Rucci and his fair young wife. They had taken a villa on the banks of the lake for the summer season, and soon renewed their acquaintance with the Englishman. A water excursion had been planned for this afternoon between the friends.

A couple of hours later, a very pleasant party embark at the Villa Rucci, consisting of the Count and Countess, their three pretty children, and the young Englishman. Gayly they glide over the clear, rippling bosom of the lake, the sculls being wielded by the two gentlemen with much dexterity.

The Countess is much occupied with her children, to whom she is devotedly attached. The eldest of them is a little girl of some eight summers, with a piquant, pretty face, and charming little ways. She leans over the side of the skiff, laving her little hands in the passing waters, and singing a child's ditty, in a low voice, to herself.

They have passed the town of Como by some little distance, and are laughing and chatting together merrily, when there is a little jerk of the boat, a child's scream and a sudden splash, and away there, behind them, is the little Bianca, struggling in the lake. Every moment the distance is increasing, and a cry of anguish escapes from the pale lips of the Countess. Calmly, and without a second thought, the young Englishman rises and springs lightly from the stern of the skiff into the water, scarcely causing a change in the frail craft's equilibrium. He comes to the surface, and, with a few powerful strokes, gains the child's side, just as she is sinking forever, and is more than half insensible. He seizes her round the waist with the ease of an expert swimmer and turns toward the boat. The Count has brought it to, and is pulling toward them. The rescuer keeps up his pretty burden with apparently little exertion; and when the boat comes alongside, Bianca is lifted in first, and the young Englishman is carefully helped over the stern again by the Count. The young mother covers his wet hands with her kisses and looks her prayers and thanks out of her tearful eyes. Bianca is recovering, and her rescuer laughs lightly at his saving deed.

They pull back toward Como, with thankful hearts, though with subdued spirits; and after more profuse thanks, the young Englishman borrows a horse at the hotel, and rides sharply homeward.

Reclining luxuriously, in her elegant boudoir,

is Leonora, the whilom *prima donna*. She is alone, and a troubled expression is on her beautiful features, as she taps the floor impatiently with her dainty little foot. The casements stand open, and the afternoon sunshine is flooding the balcony outside, which is full thirty feet from the ground, and commands a magnificent prospect over lake and mountain, blue in the autumnal haze.

Presently there is a faint rap at the door, and she bids the intruder enter with a deep frown. She doesn't look round to see who it is, but exclaims petulantly, "Didn't I tell you, Annina, I wanted to be alone? My head aches badly, and your endless chatter annoys me."

The door is closed quietly, and silence follows her words, as she turns to find the reason. Every trace of color leaves her face, and she starts to her feet wildly as she sees a man with a handsome, passionate countenance, swarthy Italian complexion, and whose black eyes are following her every movement with a strange glitter. His dress is picturesque, and scarcely that belonging to modern society, though not sufficiently extravagant to excite unusual attention. Beneath his loose velvet jacket peep forth the ends of a scarf, in whose crimson folds gleams the hilt of a stiletto.

"Stephano!" she gasps.

"I am come, you see! I always told you I should! Does your head ache, indeed?" he asks, with a low, mocking laugh. "*Cospetto!* it isn't your heart—you never had one!"

"Rash man! How dare you come here? If my husband met you it would be death to us both!"

"Ha! I fear him not! Let him come; we have met before. He was too quick for me; but next time it shall not be in vain!"

"Wretch! You were the assassin!" she cries. "I little dreamt it. Go! Leave me on the instant, or I call for help!" And with a thrilling majesty worthy of the grand actress that she is, she points to the door.

But he does not stir; only regards her fixedly with those brilliant eyes, and a scornful smile on the thin lips.

"You dare not call!" he hisses, tauntingly. "I have a little friend here"—tapping his stiletto significantly—"that would settle all our differences in a moment, my beauty! You must know me better. You have forgotten my love—you shall not forget my hate, Leonora! I will deal you death, rather than know that you live with another."

She recoils from him, sinking back in the *fauteuil* with a groan.

"Oh, Heaven, defend me!"

A sudden light flits over the handsome face of the Italian. A soft expression molds its dark lines almost into tenderness. He draws near the *fauteuil*, and sinks on his knee beside it gently.

"Leonora, I give my life into your hands!" And he flings the stiletto through the casements, and it falls, glittering and twirling in the sun, to the grounds beneath. "Forgive me! My love for you has made me cruel, wicked—but forget all! You have tried me, and have found me true. You will smile on me now!" And he takes her little hand, and bends over her in lover-like fashion.

She half turns from him; but does not repulse him—does not take her hand away.

"You must leave me, Stephano," she murmurs, brokenly. "I cannot listen to you! Remember, I am a wife!"

"Why are you a wife?" he chides, not roughly. "Did you not give me your promise that you would wait, Leonora, till my estates were restored to me? Why marry this Englishman?"

"Ah, Stephano! I did not hear from you. I thought you had forgotten me. This Englishman was handsome, and rich, and good to me. I thought I loved him. I did love him a little, and you did not come. What could I do?"

As she looks up at him appealingly, the tears are standing thick in her dark eyes, and the haughtiness has fled from her beautiful features.

"Come with me," he whispers, softly, "and repair the past. Listen to me, Leonora! In those days—those dark days at your father's castle, when we exchanged hearts, and you vowed to be faithful, I was poor—an outcast, ay, a captain of brigands, even. Robbery and pillage were my livelihood; but the crime was the State's. The State robbed me first. Now, all that is changed. I made my claim to the present Government. Last month they made me restitution of everything—my lands, my title, my position in society; for no shame attaches to a political exile when his party triumphs. But what is all this without my love? Those dark days, long past, were happier. And now, when everything is bright, this foreigner comes between us. But it shall not be! Come with me, Leonora! He is a heretic. We can have a divorce; nothing easier! Only listen to me, and come." And his vehement, pleading face and glowing eyes beam on her as he kneels by her side.

Fierce emotions are contending for the mastery in that heaving bosom; the blood comes and goes in a crimson flood on the haughty brow; but she shakes her head and murmurs, "I cannot! Be kind, and do not press me, Stephano. I cannot go!"

Their backs are to the door, and so absorbed are they, that they do not hear it open slowly, and a man, the water still dripping from his clothes, enter and stand listening, in mute astonishment.

"Nay, you must hear me, Leonora! I have ventured everything to-day. The place was quiet; I crept up here. He is away; I know it! I have horses in waiting; we could be gone miles before he returns. Come with me, then. Do you not still love me, Leonora?"

The expression is growing cruelly hard and stern on the listener's face; but he is motionless. Only, his deep-blue eyes glisten like burnished steel, as he watches.

The Italian draws her toward him passionately. Her face is very pale, and there are tears on her long, drooping lashes.

She resists him feebly—too feebly to oppose his fervent embrace. She is in his arms now.

"Do you love me still? Whisper, dearest!"

One vain effort for release and honor, a broken, tremulous sob, and the beautiful head sinks on his breast, subdued.

With a wild curse—the yell of a demon rather than the hoarse cry of a man—the listener is on them.

The form of the wily lover is torn from the soft embrace, whirled round, and flung to the floor.

The next instant, the lithe Italian and the young Englishman are rolling over and over, grappling in a deadly contest.

British muscle prevails, and the Englishman gripes his opponent by the throat, and drags him, struggling, choking, toward the open casement.

There is an unearthly wail behind them, and then, with blanched features, the beautiful woman is hanging to her husband's arm, pleading with him in fierce, passionate words for mercy on the doomed man.

But no glimmer of mercy can she hope for in that hard, cruel, young face; and, distractedly she rushes to a cheffonier, and searches for something.

Nearer that grappling couple approach the balcony—nearer. Now they are on it, and, desperately, the supple limbs of the Italian cling to the balustrade, the perspiration standing on those white, despairing features.

Not a word is uttered; nothing but the short, quick panting between hard-set teeth; and then, with brutal strength, the ill-fated man is bent over the parapet—bent lower and lower, his struggles growing more and more feeble, till he has no longer power to make the slightest resistance; his clutch yields, and he crashes onto the marble esplanade below.

Shuddering, breathless, but with expression not a whit less cruel, the Englishman turns,

to find his wife leaning over the parapet at his side. Servants hurry into the room; servants rush to that mangled heap of humanity below.

They raise it, and bear it hence. Ghastly and hideous in their distorted loveliness are her features, as she watches. Suddenly she raises her hand, and something gleams bright in it.

Quickly it descends toward her bosom; yet not so quickly as the iron gripe on her wrist of him beside her. He wrests the stiletto away; and, seizing her by the waist, bears her back into the room. Then she grapples with him with the giant strength of madness. Her eyes shine with a fiendish light; horrid, mocking laughter breaks from her lips, followed by wild, incoherent words, in a strange, thrilling voice, and he redoubles his hold on her, for he knows that he is clasping a raving maniac.

CHAPTER III.

AT THE "SILVER TROUT."

It was winter at Grimspeth. The snow lay in a white mantle some two or three inches thick over the land, and it had drifted and filled up one of the ditches that ran along the high road through Grimspeth so effectually that it would be a mercy if some unwary traveler on foot did not walk through its treacherous white surface into the aforesaid ditch.

Grimspeth Hall, hamlet, and park—for to all three did this cognomen appertain—lay some six miles from the little market-town of Chilhampton in the pleasant county of Devonshire.

Scarcely could the dozen or so of farm-houses and cottages that lay alongside the high road just beyond the park limits be dignified with the name of village, even. As Grimspeth hamlet it was spoken of, followed usually by the remark, "and a very dull place it is."

Perhaps, on the winter's evening on which we first became acquainted with Grimspeth, the least dull scene in it was the bar-room of the "Silver Trout."

This was the only inn within some miles of the hamlet, and was patronized accordingly.

The room was a sort of compromise between a kitchen and a parlor—an array of pots, pans and plates peeping forth from one side, and an ancient cabinet and a small round table, holding several grim-covered, worn books, appearing at another.

Opposite the great, old-fashioned fireplace, on whose wide hearth crackled a log fire lustily, was the little bar; and its pewter pots and brass fittings, with the low, dark rafters of the ceiling above, glowing in the ruddy glare of the firelight.

Though it was not yet eight o'clock, mine host had taken his seat for the evening in the warmest corner by the fire. Some five or six farmers of the neighborhood were sitting about, and pipes were lighted, and the blue tobacco-smoke was curling and wreathing in fantastic shapes among the old rafters, while the home-brewed ale went its jovial round.

Mine host of the "Silver Trout" was a widower. Perhaps that was the reason he was so round, rosy and jolly; and if at times a trifle testy, and inclined to be short-tempered, it was no more than was to be expected from a full-blooded autocrat such as he. For, besides being landlord of the "Silver Trout," he rented the largest farm on the Grimspeth estate, as his father had done before him, and a nice little sum of money he had put away over it; and he lorded it just as mightily over his farm-laborers and their families as over the one or two servants who had long been about the old inn.

But there was one young person of his household over whom he exercised very little authority, and that was his daughter—an only child.

Indeed, pretty Lucy Norman seemed to have

her own sweet way, not only with her old father, but with every one else at Grimspeth. To attempt to control her would be something like attempting to control a butterfly dancing in the sunlight.

She was as saucy, piquante, warm-hearted a maid as any among the bonny lasses of county Devon. A soft, golden brown were the wavy tresses swept back from her white brow; mirthful, deep blue eyes met your gaze coyly from out the witching face, with its rosy cheeks and lips, dimpled with roguish smiles; a twinkling ankle, neatly turned; a trim figure, firm and well-rounded, yet buoyant as a fairy's, and there you have Mistress Lucy Norman.

This sharp, wintry evening she kept tripping blithely to and fro—"trip" is the only term applicable to her airy mode of progression—between her own little room and the bar-parlor, as it was called, bestowing her bright smiles and using her smart little tongue among the worthy farmers.

Every now and again she would slip down the passage, open the big entrance door just far enough to admit her little head, and peep over the low garden-hedge, and up and down the dreary, white-sheeted high road.

"Now, lass; it's no good looking out o' that door," came her father's cheery tones from the bar-parlor, as he heard her on one of these little excursions. "He won't be coming down this night to see ye."

"You know nothing about it, dad!" was her saucy reply, as she put in an appearance behind the little bar. "He promised to come to-night, and when Harold promises he always keeps his word. Brown October, did you say, Mr. Jennings?" going to a large cask stowed away beneath the bar.

When the wants of Farmer Jennings had been attended to, she disappeared again.

"It be strange-like the young Squeer should roam about furrin parts, and care naught about his own land," observed a short, elderly farmer, who sat in the corner of the fireplace, facing mine host. "If all the stories one hears about him be true, he's a bit of the old Grimspeth grit."

"Ay, ay, that be true!" put in Farmer Jennings, a big, burly man, standing six feet two in his stockings, and with shoulders like an ox; "they be a wild race, those Grimspeths—free-handed enough, but as hard as hard. I mind the day the old Squeer—this 'un's feyther—broke my 'ead with the butt-end o' his whip, 'cause I was swinging on the farm-gate, and frightened that gray mare o' his. The next day he sees me, and gives me a gold poond to get it mended again. I was young then, and would ha' got it broke twice a day at the price."

This was treated as a joke, and greeted with a roar of laughter. When it had subsided, mine host said, "Yes; that's just the way o' the Grimspeths. My dad used to tell some tales o' the Squeer, who was the grandfeather of this 'un; but they're all o' the seame sort. Oh, bless my soul, what a change there is about the old Hall sence I can 'member it!"

"Is it true," asked a young farmer, sitting back a little from the circle, and who had not got the rustic twang of those about him—"is it true the present Squire is the last one bearing the family name?"

"It be true enough, Mr. Giles," returned mine host, shaking his head gravely. "You be rather a new-comer among us here, or you might ha' known that afore."

"And has the family been much thought of—much liked round about?" pursued the young farmer.

"Loved, sir—loved!" exclaimed mine host, warmly. "As sure's my name's Joe Norman, there isn't a thing, a service, I wouldn't ha' done out o' pure love for the Grimspeths; and my feyther and his feyther afore him the seame. We would ha' spilled our blood, and welcome, for them. Yes, they're much loved hereabout."

"But what's this about the young Squire's marriage?" asked the young farmer. "I

thought he was married abroad. Is there no likelihood of any children?"

"Ah, that was more'n seven years ago," replied mine host. "They say she was an opera-singer, or something o' that sort, and she went mad, and then died, and was put in a 'sylum. It's a strange story."

"And who was the old man who died at the Hall last month?" inquired another farmer, with a rubicund nose, which had been hidden for the last minute in a great brown jug.

"That was an old Italian servant o' the Squeer's," returned mine host. "Nobody could make much out o' him, because he couldn't speak a word o' English. What was his name—Pojo?"

"No; Jacopo!" replied the short, elderly farmer, sitting in the corner opposite mine host.

"Oh, ah; and his old wife lives at the Hall still, all alone."

"'Cept for the ghosties," put in Farmer Jennings. "There's been talk enough about the old place being haunted lately."

"Likely as not," said mine host. "But Martin Rawle could tell most about that. He's the only one up there now."

Just then the outer door was heard to open, followed by approaching footsteps.

"That's my lass's sweetheart, young Master Harold, I'll warrant!" exclaimed mine host, with a knowing wag of his head. But at that moment the new-comer entered.

"Hullo, Mr. Rawle," said mine host; "we were just speaking o' you and the young Squeer. Here's a cheer for ye."

Martin Rawle was a long, thin man, with bushy, dark beard, weather-stained features, and bony hands. He was much respected about there, for he was Sir Ralph Grimspeth's bailiff, had the leasing of the farms, looking after the preserves, and general management of the property. He was rather a reserved man, and lived with only an old housekeeper in the bailiff's house on the estate.

"Ye can tell us, Mr. Rawle, how long it is since the Squeer was here, I suppose?" asked Farmer Jennings, when the bailiff was seated, and had been served with a jug of the "brown October" by a maid behind the bar.

"Nigh on four year," replied Martin Rawle, filling his clay pipe, "and then he only stayed a few days to settle a little business."

"Most time he came to settle a bit more business, I should think," put in mine host, with a chuckle.

"And mayhap it won't be long before he does come," said the bailiff, gravely, puffing a cloud of smoke round his head, and then relapsing into silence.

Silence also fell on the group in front of the ruddy fireplace, and they smoked their long pipes a few minutes contemplatively. There was another bar on the other side of the passage, rather larger, and for more general use, and some of the farm-laborers sat there sometimes of an evening. The hum of their talk and the clatter of pots could be heard by those sitting in the bar-parlor now.

Presently there was a sharp ring of a horse's iron shoes on the hard-frozen snow outside as a rider drew rein before the old inn.

CHAPTER IV.

LOVE-MAKING.

It was a fact somewhat strange, that no sooner had the sound of the horse's hoofs become audible than the entrance door at the end of the passage was promptly closed, and Miss Lucy tripped back blithely to her room, without apparently bestowing another thought on the approaching rider.

A minute after he rushed into the bar-parlor, and looked about eagerly for some one; but was evidently disappointed.

"Aha, Master Harold?" cried mine host. "It be hard riding to-night, eh? Oh, she be waiting inside for ye," pointing with his pipe over his shoulder. "She's been dancing about all the evening on the look-out."

Returning the greetings of the assembled company, the young man divested himself of his outer coat, and laid his hat and riding-whip on a chair. Then he left the bar-parlor, and knocked at the door of the little room next to it impatiently.

There was a pause, succeeded by an abrupt "Come in," as grimly uttered as sweet little feminine tones could utter it.

He burst in, and there was the young lady he sought, deeply absorbed, to all appearance, over a complicated piece of needlework before her. She hadn't even time to look up to see who entered.

"Why, Lucy, what are you doing? Not a good-evening—not even a smile! Why, where are your manners?" he exclaimed, going up to her.

He bent over her, and pressed a kiss on her red lips. Then she started, and looked up with a little frown of mock severity.

"Oh, is that you, Mr. Forrester? You are here already! I am surprised you've troubled to come at all; such a bad night, too."

And then she returned to her complicated piece of needlework with a little toss of her head.

"What a terrible tyrant you are! You might be sure I should come, Lucy. Better late than never, they say."

"So you seem to think, Mr. Forrester. I wish you wouldn't practice it so often," was the grim rejoinder. "I expected you in the course of the evening; it is now nine o'clock at night—close on bedtime."

"Indeed! Well, as it's your bedtime, Miss Norman, I won't detain you another instant," and with a twinkle in his dark eye, the young man turned to the door.

But his hand was scarcely on the handle before there was a rustle behind him, and he felt himself most unceremoniously seized and hauled backward by his coat-tails.

"Come back, sir. I didn't give you leave to go off in that fashion, without a good-night, even. Why, where are *your* manners?"

"I won't come back unless you put away that needlework!" he exclaimed, keeping his ground by the door, notwithstanding the little tyrant at his coat-tails.

"Oh, you monster! You wish me to be as lazy as you are."

"I'm off, then. Good-night!"

"No, no; I agree."

"You're quite right?"

"Perhaps—yes, I'm sure," for he had got half-way through the door.

"Then, now for your punishment, Miss Tyrant."

And turning quickly, he clasped her in his arms, and smothered her face with kisses.

"Don't! Be quiet, Harold! How dare you, sir? Leave off, or I'll scream, and then dad'll come!"

With a gay laugh, he released her, looking as red as the roses in June.

"You're a bad, hard-hearted fellow!" she pouted, with an injured air; "and I'll never forgive you!"

"Hard-hearted, do you call it? Well, you've had your deserts, at any rate. And now we'll cry a truce, Lucy; shall we?"

"I don't think I feel inclined to, sir."

"Oh, well, then, we must try another"—menacing her with a repetition of his embrace.

"A truce! a truce!" she exclaimed, keeping him at arm's length with the utmost difficulty.

Harmony being restored, she resumed her seat in front of the small fireplace, and he drew a chair close beside her.

"Not too close, sir!" said she, edging her chair away.

"As close as I like, miss," following her up, and preventing all further straying by placing his arm round her waist.

"Well, what's the latest news, Lucy?"

"Nothing in particular; except that Mrs. Bolt's little boy was missing all the day yesterday, and they thought he was lost in a snow-drift, and we all went looking for him; and at

last, when poor Mrs. Bolt was nearly dead with fright, we found him sitting comfortably in the pig-sty, quite at home."

"A boy of discerning parts, I should think," replied the young man.

"Mrs. Bolt didn't think so, at any rate. Oh! and Farmer Puddle's white cow died last night."

"Great news, indeed. Nothing else to tell me?"

"No; I don't think— Oh, yes; one fearful thing, Harold! You mustn't laugh. I had been over to Mrs. Bolt's this morning to see how she was, and for a short cut I came back across the park, and round by the Hall, because the snow doesn't lie much in the Broad Walk, owing to the trees that shelter it. Well, the Hall is shut up, you know, and only an old woman lives there, whose husband died a little while ago. I never do like going past that right wing, because they say it's haunted; and so I was hurrying by, and looking down the long line of windows, each with its dingy shutters closed, when, right in front of me, not ten feet away, one of the shutters was drawn back slowly, and, to my horror, a fierce, dark woman's face gleamed on me. She beckoned to me wildly, and for the moment I almost screamed with fear; but then, thinking how silly it was to fancy a ghost would appear by daylight, I forced myself to go up to the window. Just as I was within a step or two, the shutter was suddenly banged to, as if by somebody within, the face disappeared from view, and the window looked exactly like all the others again. It was done so quickly, it seemed like magic."

"How strange!" said the young man called Harold. "What did you do then?"

"I scampered off as hard as I could, and was just getting close to the park gates, when I heard some one following me quickly. I peeped round to see who it was, and should have shrieked had it been that woman; but it was only Mr. Rawle."

"Did you tell him?"

"Yes; and he only laughed, and said it must have been my fancy, or else it was the old Italian woman, Annina. But he said I had better not tell it about, as there was quite enough said about the Hall being haunted as it was; so you are the first I have mentioned it to, Harold."

"Quite right, dear. It's a very curious affair, certainly; but I shouldn't think about it. You can't do any thing. Now, if that's all the news you've got to tell me, shall I tell you mine?"

"Of course, Harold! What a tease you are!" she exclaimed, turning on him petulantly. "Why didn't you say you had something to tell me, instead of letting me chatter all that rubbish?"

"So you call it rubbish? I'm glad to hear that, Lucy. Well, my news is, that just as I was starting for here this evening, Mr. Channing sent for me. He said that Mr. Mills, our head cashier, was going to leave for a better appointment; that Mr. James, second cashier, was to take his place; and then he offered to make me second cashier, with a salary of—listen, Lucy!"

And he bent forward, and whispered something in her ear.

"Oh, Harold, you are a duck!" she cried, flinging her arms round him, and giving him a vigorous hug.

"That was worth being late for, eh, Lucy?" he asked, slyly.

"You bad fellow! why didn't you tell me of it at once? I should have been boiling over with such news."

"Well, Lucy, they say women are variable. A little while since I was a tease, then a duck, and now a bad fellow. Which is it to be?"

"Don't ask silly questions that you ought to know yourself, sir!" she returned, inflicting a pinch on his arm by way of punishment.

Just then they heard the scuffling of heavy feet, and breaking up of the party in the bar-parlor.

"Dear me, Lucy! it must be nearly ten

o'clock!" exclaimed the young man, starting to his feet. "I must be moving, dear."

"You won't be back to Chilhampton till nearly eleven, Harold."

"No; and you seem to have forgotten all about that bedtime you were so anxious for a short time since," he said, maliciously.

"Never mind about me, sir; I was pitying you and your long ride," she replied, severely.

"When will you be down again, Harold?"

"On Sunday, dear. And then I shall tell your father of my good luck, if you don't let it out meanwhile, Miss Puss. And besides, I've got a question to ask him."

"What is it dear?"

"Whether he doesn't think it's time for us to name a certain day."

"It's quite enough if you ask me, Master Harold. That's nothing to do with dad."

"What's that, ye young rebel?" came mine host's cheery voice from behind them.

"Oh, nothing, dad. Harold's been teasing me, that's all. He's a dear, bad fellow."

"Ah, they're all the same, lass. When I was a young man, we were all tied to our mam's apron-strings till foive-and-twenty. Nowadays the lads gad about after the lasses afore they've left their teens."

"It isn't the lads, Mr. Norman; it's the lassies' fault," returned the young man, warmly.

"How dare you say so, Harold?" cried the young lady, administering another pinch, that made him jump.

"He-he!—and maybe you're part right," said mine host, shaking his head wisely at his pretty daughter.

"I can hear Jem round at the front with the mare," exclaimed the young man. "Good-by, Lucy, my love! I must be off. On Sunday, then. Good-by, Mr. Norman!"

With another kiss from his lady love, and a parting hand-shake from mine host, he went out into the cold night air.

The ostler was leading his mare up and down on the road before the inn.

In a moment he was in the saddle, and with a wave of his hand, cantering away down the hard, silent highway.

The night was terribly cold, with that still, keen, biting frost but rarely met with in mild county Devon.

The lowering, leaden pall that had been hanging over the white land all day, had rolled itself away, disclosing a silvery half moon, still young in its second quarter.

Harold Forrester, galloping homeward in the calm moonlight, was thinking over the sad times gone by, and picturing to himself the pleasant times to come.

He had been but too familiar with the former from his childhood up; but the promises of the future looked bright and captivating now, as to fond youth they ever will look.

He was an orphan, without kith or kin, excepting a maiden aunt, a sister of his father's, who lived with him.

His father had been a man well to do, and owning considerable property round Chilhampton, but in an evil hour he had speculated. His wife had died in giving birth to their first son, Harold; and some few years after that, he had been obliged to quit his beautiful country home, ruined in fortune and broken in spirit.

Dark days from that time forth dawned for young Harold Forrester.

In his days of prosperity, Mr. Forrester, senior, had been very intimate with Sir Geoffrey Grimspeeth, the present Baronet's father.

Before Harold was twelve years of age his father died, leaving him almost penniless; and then the worthy Sir Geoffrey came forward and took the poor boy into his own family, having brought him up with his son, Ralph.

When Sir Ralph Grimspeeth came to his title, he was about two-and-twenty years of age.

Desiring to travel, he offered to place Harold, who was five years his junior, with the well-known Chilhampton bankers, Channing, Heth

and Co., which offer the youth gladly accepted.

Since that time, seven or eight years ago, Sir Ralph had returned but twice to his ancestral home; but on each occasion had looked up his young friend, and found him in high favor with his employers.

Harold lived in Chilhampton with his aunt Forrester, who had only a scanty income of her own, and was partially dependent on him.

He had fallen in love with, and become engaged to, the pretty daughter of mine host of the "Silver Trout," the old gentleman stipulating only for a son-in-law in a fairly prosperous and assured position before a marriage should take place.

The advance in salary that the young man had received that evening would, he hoped, place him in the position required.

As he rode along that winter's evening, his firm and graceful figure stood out clearly against the white fields on either side.

He was middle-sized, and rather slightly made, though muscular. He had curly black hair, a black mustache, and black eyes, that gleamed often with a quick, fitful eagerness.

His features were regular and good; yet, perhaps, there was a touch of indecision about the chin, that might tell a tale in the future of following the evil counsels of others, instead of his own good sense.

In the bank he was accounted clever, suave in temper, and successful; though given at times to strange irascible moods, during which friends, business, every thing was sacrificed to his passing ire.

But these humors were, fortunately for him, very occasional.

He had covered more than half the distance of his ride, when he saw a horseman approaching him from Chilhampton at a hand-gallop. Considering the slippery condition of the roads, he was going along at a good, round pace, and in a manner that seemed almost reckless.

Surprised to see any one pursuing that lonely way at that time of night, Harold drew rein as the rider came up. He was a tall, broad, gaunt-looking man, sitting square and firm in his saddle. He sped by without a glance at the other; but Harold caught one glimpse of a stern face in the moonlight, that caused him to start with a muttered exclamation. Then he sat gazing intently after the fast-receding figure, listening to the sharp ring of the horse's hoofs fading away in the distance, before, drawing a deep breath, he resumed his way.

"If that wasn't Ralph Grimspeth, it was his ghost," he murmured, with a sudden shudder—perhaps from the chill night air. At any rate, he briskened up the mare with his riding-whip to a pace that would soon carry him to Chilhampton.

CHAPTER V.

GRIMSPETH HALL.

GREAT was the astonishment felt and expressed the next morning by the worthy farmers and cottagers of Grimspeth hamlet when it was noised about that the "young Squeer" had returned to his ancestral home the previous evening. Two or three stragglers dropping into the "Silver Trout," mine host narrated how he had as good as prophesied the occurrence to Martin Rawle the night before. In the dullness of Grimspeth existence, such an event as this assumed considerable importance, and was the occasion of much talk, which, being dry work, brought an increased flow of custom to the "Silver Trout."

During the afternoon, Sir Ralph came down through the hamlet on his mettled gray steed, exchanging a word here and there with his farm-tenants, and standing some minutes in front of the inn to chat with mine host. And when, in the evening, Martin Rawle informed the company in the bar-parlor that the young Baronet had come back to settle down among his people at last, the news was greeted by all with a shout of pleasure.

It was soon apparent, from the changes go-

ing forward at the Hall, that Sir Ralph had indeed returned with the intention of taking up his abode there. Painters, decorators, and upholsterers from Chilhampton were put to work; a full staff of servants and grooms was taken on; a house-steward with high recommendations engaged, and his wife installed as housekeeper; and under these auspices the dullness of Grimspeth cleared off like a heavy cloud before a high wind.

And in a few weeks the county families began to waken up to the fact that the young Baronet had arrived, and family chariots rolled up the avenue of fine old elms to the Hall door, where cards, and inquiries, and compliments were deposited before they rolled away again.

Then invitations commenced to flow in; old friends of the family were desirous of becoming acquainted with the last scion of the house of Grimspeth, and Sir Ralph found himself beset on all sides. Neither did he seem loth to give himself up to these dissipations; and Christmas came and went, and the frost and snow with it, and then it was announced that there was to be a grand ball at Grimspeth Hall, to which the gentry far and near were invited.

Harold Forrester had meanwhile obtained the consent of the father of his lady-love to their marriage taking place early in the coming summer.

Sir Ralph had met and congratulated him on his good fortune, and cordially invited him up to the Hall whenever he should have an opportunity of coming. Once or twice a week, Harold never neglected to put in an appearance at the "Silver Trout," and altogether the course of his true love was running very smoothly.

One afternoon Sir Ralph dismounted in front of the "Silver Trout," and entered, and walked through into the bar-parlor. Pretty Mistress Lucy was there, engaged in some domestic duties. Looking up, and seeing who the distinguished intruder was, she courtesied, and blushed up to her temples.

"Good day, Miss Lucy," said the Baronet, in his calm, equable tones. "Very busy, I see. Really, you are looking charming; and I must say my young friend Harold has some right to consider himself lucky!"

Of course this remark increased the young lady's confusion, and she had to bend low over her work to hide it. Sir Ralph noticed it, however, and smiled to himself, as he continued:

"I have come to ask a favor of you, Miss Lucy. But perhaps your father is the proper person to refer to, in the first place. Where is Norman?"

At that moment mine host, hearing a strange voice, entered, looking as round and jolly as usual. After hearty greetings between him and the Baronet, the latter said, "My housekeeper, Mrs. Tyler, was here the other day, I think, Norman? Well, I've just been telling Miss Lucy I have a favor to ask her. Mrs. Tyler says she is short-handed, or wanting help of some kind. There's a great deal to do in a household freshly started like mine, I suppose. She saw your daughter when she was down here, and took quite a fancy to her. Now, if Miss Lucy can spare a few afternoons in the week to run up to the Hall, and help look after things, she will be doing Mrs. Tyler a service, I think."

Mine host was only too glad to be able to oblige his young landlord, and gave his consent forthwith. Lucy herself was delighted with the prospect of reveling in the mysteries and pleasures of the grand establishment, and, after that, four or five afternoons in the week she spent there, and soon made herself quite familiar, and became Mrs. Tyler's "right hand."

It is true that Harold, on one or two evenings, had arrived at the "Silver Trout," expecting to meet his lady-love, and was not best pleased on being told that she was at the Hall, and having to trudge thither to find her. But these were exceptions, as, when she knew of

his coming, she arranged to be at home to meet him.

For some little time after Sir Ralph's return, conjectures were rife among the gentry of that part of Devon as to whether his wife was living, or he a widower, or whether he had ever been married, after all. He was grimly mute himself on the subject, and among the many friends and acquaintances he met now, there were none hardy enough to put the question to him direct. If, in the course of conversation, a slight hint were thrown out, the talker met with a steady, fixed stare for his pains, that he was not likely to forget soon. Yet it gradually gained ground that the young Baronet—whether widower or bachelor—was unfettered, and enterprising mothers with families of grown-up daughters caught eagerly at the belief. Sir Ralph so favored the rumor himself as not to give it verbal contradiction.

Sir Ralph Grimspeth at this time was about thirty years of age. That he was a handsome man there was no doubt. Judging from his appearance, he might have descended from old, regal, Saxon blood, and an artist would have chosen him as his ideal of Athelstane, or ill-fated King Harold. He was tall, square, and muscular in figure, and the fair flaxen hair clustered in short, thick curls over his head. He was a little pale, but his features were fine, and the firm, abrupt chin, tawny mustache, and deep-blue eyes that looked so dreamy, lent character to them. Yet with all this there was a sad, pitiless, hard-set expression on that face; and from the eyes, for all their dreaminess, shot sometimes a tiny diamond shaft of light, that told of smoldering fires within, crushed down by iron will. Though indulging now in the society of his neighbors a good deal, it seemed rather as a duty and relief, and he was usually taciturn, with little apparent desire of making friends.

The pretty daughter of mine host had not made many visits to the Hall before she found there were some strange proceedings and injunctions on the household that roused her feminine curiosity considerably. Even Mrs. Tyler, a motherly, good-hearted soul, could give no satisfactory explanation to her queries.

The ground floor of the right wing—the haunted wing, as it was known in Grimspeth hamlet—was now in daily use; but Lucy had always had a desire to explore the floor above it, and one afternoon, having nothing particular to do, she asked Mrs. Tyler if there would be any objection to her doing so.

The worthy housekeeper seemed horrified at the bare suggestion, and then informed her that Sir Ralph had strictly ordered that no member of the household should be permitted to enter that portion of the right wing. It was to be reserved, she said, solely for the use of the wife of the old Italian servant, who died there lately, and there was no gainsaying the young Baronet's words.

"But there must be five rooms leading into that corridor," said Lucy, surprised.

"So I should think, my dear," replied Mrs. Tyler, "though I have never been there myself. The old woman's name is Annina, and it's very little English she can talk. Her meals are all carried up onto the table-slab at the end of the corridor, and then she takes them in herself. And nice dainties she do have, too—as good as ever go into the big dining-room. That's by master's orders. And her appetite's very good for an old woman, for I do declare she eats more than I do."

"And does no one ever go there—not a servant even to attend to the rooms?"

"No, my dear. At times the old woman do come down and borrow a pail and broom, and then she cleans them herself. And Sir Ralph has had water laid on, and a bath-room made on that floor specially for her."

"Well, I wonder if she is haunted," laughed Lucy. "Perhaps it's through her the place has got the name for it."

"There's one thing, my dear," said Mrs. Tyler, confidentially, "there's strange sounds heard at times from that right wing. My hus-

band was going by the end of the corridor one night, and he vows he heard laughing and talking going on in some gibberish tongue. And Wilkins—that's the head groom, what sleeps over the coach-house opposite—he says he's seen lights in two of those windows half the night long, and shadows of more than one person on the blinds. Now, what I ask is, what can one old woman do with two rooms lit up and more than one shadow? As I said to Tyler, 'There's mystery about it, Tyler, and it isn't natural.' But it's no good, my dear, to ask Sir Ralph. There's none of us would go to do it."

The edge of Mistress Lucy's curiosity was whetted, and that edge was very keen; yet she was fain to go about with it unsatisfied. And with that there was another feeling that divided her attention lately, for sweetheart Harold had taken an unreasonable dislike to her frequent visits at the Hall, and she had the greatest difficulty in persuading him to look upon them in a charitable light.

"There is not the least little cause for jealousy, friend Harold," she said, with a little sly laugh, after returning one evening and finding him waiting for her. "There's only Swunkey, the butler, and he's a widower, and so stout he can't tie his boot-laces. Mr. Wilkins isn't married; but then he's been a jockey, and then a temperance preacher, and now he's turned Methodist and groom, and drinks rum and water. I don't think he'd suit, do you?"

"No, Lucy," returned Harold; "as far as my peace of mind is concerned, I don't think either Swunkey or Wilkins is likely to disturb it."

But in reply to her quick query of "Who then?" he closed the conversation abruptly by saying that he wished to think nothing more about it.

CHAPTER VI.

EAVESDROPPING.

ON the other side of Chilhampton lay the estates of the Tremaine family. They extended some miles, for the Earl of Tremaine was one of the largest landholders in Devonshire, and would have been one of the wealthiest if it had not been for the mortgages incurred through the wild extravagance of his uncle, the late Earl.

Sir Ralph Grimspeeth had made a visit of a few days to Tremaine Castle by invitation, and now many-tongued rumor was busy whispering that at last his inclinations had become matrimonial, and that the Lady Alice—the youngest daughter of the house—was the object of his attentions.

Rumor even went so far as to state that the young lady's mother, the Countess of Tremaine, favored the suit; and if so, the matter might be considered pretty well settled, for the Earl would be sure to follow his wife's lead.

When these reports permeated to Grimspeeth, and to the household up at the Hall, they were received doubtfully and distrustfully. For the Tremaines were a haughty and overbearing race, and, as mine host had said, "Little cause for them to be liked by their tenants and neighbors."

Martin Rawle, when it came to his ears, shook his head, as if such a thing were impossible, but didn't open his lips to speak.

Both the wings had been added to Grimspeeth Hall in the times of the First George, and were two-storied buildings in the somber manor style. Lucy and Mrs. Tyler had been attending to something in the upper story of the right wing one afternoon, the rooms of which were little better than attics over the floor devoted to the old Italian servant, Annina. They were used for lumber and storage merely.

Mrs. Tyler had gone, and Lucy was preparing to follow her, when she was startled by hearing the rich, full tones of a woman's voice stealing along the passage out of which the attics led.

Mistress Lucy summoning all her courage, approached the further end of the passage,

where the tones seemed to increase in volume. They were not very loud, but appeared to be deadened, as if some thick, non-conducting substance were between them and the listener.

After a short and close scrutiny, she discovered a narrow door let into the wall, and apparently of a piece with it. To ordinary observers it would have looked like a division in the paneling merely. There was neither knob nor handle to indicate a door, and all she saw was a small, round hole, into which she judged a key could be fitted.

Just then she heard Mrs. Tyler calling to her, and asking, in surprise, where she had got to.

She went down-stairs at once, and said nothing about the secret door, resolving to take an early opportunity of investigating it for her own private satisfaction.

This occurred a day or so after.

It was growing quite dark as Lucy slipped up to the lonely attic passage, and went toward the further end.

No singing—not a sound was to be heard now; but her heart beat fast as she saw in the dim light that the secret door was ajar. After a moment's hesitation, she pulled it slightly open, and peeped through the aperture. It was very heavy, but swung back easily, as if on well-oiled hinges. Nothing was perceivable but darkness at the first glimpse; then she fancied she caught a ray of light, like from a lamp.

All being silent, she ventured to enter what she found was a narrow passage. Gently she drew the heavy door to behind her, when, to her horror, it closed with a slight click! She pushed against it fearfully, but quite vainly. She groped about in the darkness. It appeared to be made of iron, like a large safe door, but there was no means of opening it from within.

As she realized her position, shut in this narrow passage, leading she knew not whither, a great dread took possession of her, and she trembled in every limb. There was only one thing to do—to go forward.

Nerving herself, she commenced feeling her way along the passage. It sloped downward, and after a short distance, making a sharp turn, she came suddenly upon a little spiral staircase, lighted by a small lamp from below. She paused in doubt, wondering how the lamp came there; then, hearing nothing, stole softly down the crooked, wooden stairs. When at the bottom, she found herself on a small landing, which she imagined must be on a level with the first story. No windows had she seen, and the illumination from the lamp was so dim, it scarcely sufficed to show what sort of a place she was in.

As she stood peering forward into the gloom, she suddenly fancied she heard the murmur of voices in conversation. Advancing a few steps, full of misgivings, she came upon a wide, open doorway, giving into a large space or apartment in perfect darkness.

She could see it was large, because on the opposite side, and some distance away, was another door, standing half open, and through which a flood of light was streaming into the outer blackness.

She could hear the sound of talking distinctly now from the door opposite to her, and entered the chamber of darkness with a stealthy, trembling step.

She paused the instant she could view through the further door, catching her breath with astonishment at what met her gaze.

A long, low, sumptuous saloon, brilliant with the glow of amber-colored light, suffused by two lamps, hanging from the ceiling by crimson cords.

The costly furniture and fittings, and gorgeous draperies, that screened the long case-ments, were all of deep crimson hue. The walls were delicately tinted, and relieved at intervals by glittering mirrors, set between fluted columns, with gilded capitals. And on the marble slabs of highly-carved cabinets and

side tables were scattered elegant vases of porphyry and ormolu, and rare old pieces of Sevres china ware, in tasteful profusion.

Lucy Norman took in this dazzling scene at the first glance, and did not stay to note its magnificence; for her attention was immediately absorbed by two people—the sole occupants of the apartment—who were seated on a low, broad sofa, and conversing in the murmured tones she had heard.

To her extreme surprise, she recognized in the one Sir Ralph Grimspeeth. His back was toward her, and he was leaning over a lady by his side, in a listening attitude.

Half-buried in the huge, crimson pillows, reclined, rather than sat, a woman with the most lovely face she had ever seen, Lucy thought.

Wild and beautiful was that countenance, and yet it was a fearful beauty, that carried no light to the gazer's eyes, and seemed to sear the soul with its dark, cruel haughtiness.

Glossy and black were the tresses that rippled unconfined down her back; and lustrous, velvety eyes gleamed fitfully beneath her arched, puckered eyebrows.

At times, her upper lip curled scornfully as she spoke, and her white, rounded arms, bare almost to the elbow, were crossed determinedly on her bosom.

She was arrayed in loose, *neglige* costume, from the flowing folds of which sparkled bright gems and trinkets; and, with a start, Lucy recognized the beautiful, fierce face she had seen that winter's day when hurrying past the haunted wing.

All the tales she had ever heard of the young Baronet's Italian wife swept vividly through her memory now. Keeping well in the shade, she approached nearer to the half-open door.

They were talking in a language strange to her, though every now and again the lady would mix English words with her speech.

From her low, earnest tones Lucy surmised she was beseeching Sir Ralph about something, which, in his monosyllabic replies, he was denying her. And yet Lucy fancied his voice had a softer ring in it than was its wont. And when he inclosed his companion's shapely white hand in his own, there was almost a caress about his touch.

Suddenly she started wildly to her feet, flinging off the hand-clasp, and Lucy shrunk back, trembling, as she saw the change that came over the woman in that instant.

With eyes rolling, and glaring down on the young Baronet in strange frenzy, the blood crimsoning her hitherto pale features, her bosom heaving and panting, and her fingers and hands twitching, as if longing to be griping some foe by the throat, she resembled a tiger, ready for its fatal spring.

And Lucy could almost have screamed when, the next moment, Sir Ralph seized the beautiful fury by the waist, and forced her down, struggling madly, onto the sofa.

Annina, the old Italian woman, entered, carrying a lamp, and went to the struggling woman with soothing words and gestures. Then Sir Ralph rose, lifting his wild burden in his arms—tenderly almost, Lucy thought—and approached straight toward the chamber of darkness, Annina following with the lamp.

Hastily, Lucy retired through the open doorway onto the dimly-lighted landing again. Looking back, she saw them enter the dark chamber now, closing the saloon door behind them.

With the aid of Annina's lamp, it was evident that the apartment was a bedroom; yet a bedroom of a strange description.

In addition to their being no windows, it had walls of unusual thickness and solidity; and glancing at the ponderous open door beside her, Lucy shuddered at the thought of having it closed upon her alone inside.

Sir Ralph laid the beautiful woman, still resisting fiercely, but vainly, in his powerful grasp, on a curious, hard-looking couch, standing in the middle of the room. There were

several broad leathered straps attached to it; and while he was holding his fair burden down, the old woman proceeded to fasten these round her limbs and waist, and under her arms, taking care so to secure them that the buckles were quite beneath the couch.

When she had finished, the beautiful fury was firmly fastened, and lay there gnashing her teeth, and glaring vengefully up at her captors.

Sir Ralph addressed a few words in a low tone to Annina, then came toward the outer door.

Lucy had been so much astonished and bewildered by what she had seen, that she had almost forgotten her own strange predicament. Fearing to be found in the position of an eaves-dropper by the Baronet, she cowered down in the shadow, with the hope of afterward obtaining her release through the old Italian woman. To her dismay, he closed and locked the heavy door from the outside, and, not noticing her, passed on up the spiral staircase.

In a few moments, that seemed like hours to her, she heard an abrupt exclamation from above. He had evidently discovered that the door leading onto the attic floor had been shut. Then she heard his steps slowly descending the spiral stairs again, and felt that discovery was inevitable.

She saw him slowly emerge into the dim lamplight, gazing about him with searching glance. His eyes fell upon her, and with two bounds he was at her side.

"Whom have we here?" he exclaimed, in a hard, clear voice; and, seizing her by the arm, dragged her beneath the lamp. "Lucy Norman!"

He dropped her arm, and regarded her with a stern look of inquiry.

"I'm—I'm very sorry, Sir Ralph," she faltered. "I found the—the door open, and—and—"

"How much have you seen, my girl?" he asked.

Lucy hesitated.

"Perhaps I had better ask how long you have been here?" he continued.

"Only a little while—not a quarter of an hour, sir."

"I understand," he returned, slowly. "You have seen the woman in there, then?"

"Yes," in a whisper.

"And do you know who that woman is?" bending forward to look in her face.

She faltered again.

"Yes; she is my wife, Lucy!" was the grim rejoinder; and he fell back a step or two.

CHAPTER VII.

"ROBERT, YOU WHOM I LOVE."

"YES; she is my wife," said Sir Ralph. "Miss Lucy," he continued, "quickly, 'I must ask you to be silent on this matter. As you have acquired my secret, you must be burdened with keeping it.'"

"Yes, Sir Ralph," she replied, softly.

"Do you think you can be brave—strong-minded, I may say? Judging by your nerve in finding your way here, and what you have stayed to witness, I should think so. If in future times I were to ask you to do me a service requiring courage—a service for my poor wife yonder—do you think you could do it, Lucy?"

The gentle tone in which he spoke of his wife touched her heart. It was so different to what she had always thought hidden under that grim visage and demeanor.

"I would try, sir," she answered earnestly.

"And I will take you at your word, my girl," he said, smiling down at her. "We must be friends, Lucy, and another time I will talk to you further. We will go now." And, taking a small key from his pocket, he ascended the spiral staircase again, Lucy following.

She had promised to be at the "Silver Trout" punctually at six o'clock that evening to meet Harold; but when she arrived there,

found that she had overstayed her time at the Hall, and that it was long past that hour.

As she entered the bar-parlor hastily, her cheery father greeted her with a shake of his head, saying, "Eh, lass, where have ye been? Measter Harold's been waiting this long time, and now he's gone. Rare put out he be, I tell you, and I don't wonder at it. He's left a letter for ye, though."

Poor Lucy colored up rosy red, and, taking the letter, went into her own sitting-room, without a word.

What Harold had to say was short and sharp, and referred to the necessity of young ladies keeping their appointments if they desire to keep their lovers. There were evident traces about the letter of a temper that had been too much tried, and Mistress Lucy's deep blue eyes slowly filled with tears as she read it.

The door opened slowly behind her, and the young man himself put in an appearance.

He had been to the stable to fetch his mare, and saw his lady-love arrive.

When leaving an hour or two later, all was at peace between the young couple, and he said, "I shall ride over on Thursday evening, then, to see you, Lucy; and this time I hope Grimspeith Hall won't absorb your attention half the evening."

"Oh, dear, no, Harold! Thursday is the day of the ball, you know. Oh, and it is going to be such a grand affair! Half the county is to be there."

"Is Lady Alice Marston invited?" inquired Harold, quietly.

"I think so," said Lucy, coloring faintly.

"Why, Harold?"

"Haven't you heard what the world says about her and Sir Ralph?"

"Yes; but I don't believe a word of it. I—I think it's all nonsense." And Lucy seemed somewhat confused.

"You appear to be pretty well informed as to Sir Ralph's intentions," said Harold, with a slight laugh. "At any rate, if I come on Thursday evening it will suit you, Lucy?"

"Certainly! In the afternoon I shall be up at the Hall to help Mrs. Tyler; but after six I expect they would rather have my room than my company. I shall be waiting for you."

"Quite sure, Lucy?" asked Harold, stooping to kiss her.

"Of course, you old goose!" she returned, laughing. "Why, what a jealous old fidget you are, Harold!"

"Don't call names, miss!" he exclaimed, in a tone of mock severity; and with that, and another kiss, he went forth, mounted his mare, and was gone.

The ball at Grimspeith Hall, the first given by its master since he had settled down in it again, was indeed to be a grand affair, as Lucy said.

Already, some old family friends were staying there, and an air of festivity reigned over the place. Among them was Lady Bulter, whose husband, Colonel Sir Henry Bulter, an old friend of the last baronet of Grimspeith Hall, had met his fate in India from a sepoy bullet, while heading a gallant charge.

Her only daughter accompanied her, a sprightly spinster on the shady side of thirty.

It was Lady Bulter, who willingly consented, at Sir Ralph's earnest solicitation, and on the score of old friendship, to perform the honors as hostess on the coming occasion at the Hall.

From an early hour on the eventful Thursday evening, the stream of family chariots, broughams and carriages of every description set in, flowing steadily through the lodge-gates, and up the broad avenue.

Leaning against one of the finely frescoed pilasters of the ball-room, was a young man with a slight, graceful figure, and features as delicate and effeminate as a woman's.

He seemed averse to all action, and did not dance; but lounged about from group to group, with an appearance of utterly listless

nonchalance and apathy. Yet beneath that studied air of indolence lurked a certain latent recklessness, that might at times sparkle in the dark eyes under the long lashes; and moreover, if report said true, those soft, blue-veined hands had before now made deadly practice with hair-trigger pistols, for all their whiteness.

This was the Honorable Dudley Marston, third son of the Earl of Tremaine, and a captain in the Hussars.

As the night wore on—or early morning, rather—there was an interval in the dancing, during which Madame Plumptz, the famous German cantatrice, enraptured the company with her clear, brilliant tones, from a room opening out of the ball-room, and within full hearing. And meantime the host himself was wandering, with the Lady Alice on his arm, under the soft light in the conservatory, where the atmosphere was heavy with the fragrance of choice exotics.

Madame Plumptz was engaged over "Robert, you whom I love," and the clear strains of her voice could be heard distinctly in the conservatory.

A painful, heavy shadow settled on Sir Ralph's grim visage as he listened, for the song carried bitter associations with it of scenes beside laughing blue waters, and under warm Italian skies, in the "long-ago." Lady Alice observed the cloud, and wondered somewhat, yet not too much, for she, in common with others, had heard strange accounts of Sir Ralph's past life.

Presently, at the upper end of the saloon, a vision broke on the guests that stilled the hum of conversation on the moment—the vision of a magnificent raven-haired woman, in superb black velvet and brilliant diamonds. Grand and majestic was her mien as she swept slowly through the wondering crowd of the ball-room, and turned aside into the room where Madame Plumptz was still occupied with "Robert."

"Permit me not to interrupt Madame," said the vision.

Madame Plumptz bounced to the other side of the apartment, and onto a crimson-covered *fauteuil*, scowling fearfully, and muttering to herself in her guttural language all sorts of dreadful things.

People were pressing forward from all parts of the ball-room, and the gentleman who had been accompanying the singer faced round on the music-stool in a bewildered manner.

The majestic vision smiled affably, and, slightly raising its eyebrows, said to the accompanist, "It is pity the lady will not favor the company more; she can sing well. If you will perform I shall be pleased to oblige."

After a moment's hesitation the accompanist turned to the piano again, the majestic vision took up its position complacently behind him, and there arose a voice, glorious, rich, full, and in whose subtle modulations breathed an intensity of power and expression heard but once or twice in a lifetime. With perfect art and intonation, the grand swelling tones heaved and fell over the hushed, wonder-stricken audience, thrilling every listener with a strange, calm joy, like a holy spell.

The Honorable Dudley Marston, however, didn't thrill at all, but glared at the vision in black velvet, who had turned singer, with a devil-may-care look deep in his dark eyes, that differed widely from his usual nonchalance. Sir Ralph, who was seated in the conservatory beside the Lady Alice, had heard the break-off of Madame Plumptz's warbling with some surprise; but when, a few moments after, those glorious tones fell on his ear, Lady Alice noticed the grim, deathlike pallor of his face.

"Who is it singing?" she asked, curiously. "Shall we go and see, Sir Ralph?"

He rose without a word, his teeth hard-set, and every atom of color gone from his passionless countenance. Giving not the slightest heed to his companion, he turned and quitted the conservatory with quick, nervous strides. She followed him closely, her lips tightly compressed, and her eyes shining brightly.

On he pressed through the ball-room, almost forcing his way through the crowd, toward that majestic vision, pouring forth such magnificent floods of song beside the piano. Gaunt, haggard as his features were as he strode up to her, he stood quietly by when once there, waiting till she should finish. Though her eyes fell upon him, not a falter did she make in the clear, rich tones. And when they ceased, and instead of an outburst of tumultuous applause, a weird, solemn silence prevailed, to the infinite astonishment and satisfaction of Madame Plumptz, this majestic vision of a woman turned, and bowed several times to those around, as if acknowledging the uproarious acclamations of a crowd, and murmured with low, rippling laughter, to the Baronet at her side, "These, our guests, are very solemn; not like the merry-hearted people I used to sing to in the bygone days, my Ralph."

Only a few could catch the meaning of her words, for she spoke in the smooth-flowing accents of Italy. And her splendid features were flushed and glowing with the excitement of her art, and she looked superbly beautiful as she gazed up at Sir Ralph.

But just as he, with the same cold, stern silence, had offered her his arm, Lady Bulter came forward, as if she had then awakened to the consciousness of her duties. And at that instant another lady, dark and austere-looking, likewise appeared, and the Countess of Tremaine stood before Sir Ralph.

He did not wince; he knew what was coming, and in front of all those breathless, staring bystanders his mien was as calm and impassible as ever. With a slight wave of his hand, he anticipated their questions in hard, monotonous tones: "Ladies, allow me to introduce you to—my wife, Lady Grimspeth!"

CHAPTER VIII.

TWO KISSES.

THE majestic and beautiful woman at his side bent her head gracefully as he spoke, her eyes glancing round a little wildly. There was a commotion and hum of voices among the crowded guests, and they began dropping away by twos and threes, with ominous looks. Lady Bulter had shrunk back among them, with a timid little bow and a few mumbled words, when Sir Ralph spoke. A young man lounged forward lazily, still with that deep glitter so dangerous in his dark eyes.

"My lady," he lisped, in a sweet, boy-like voice, sauntering up to the Countess, "this scene is scarcely one to delight you."

Lady Tremaine had held her ground in silent indignation before the Baronet, not taking the slightest heed of his introduction, and her scornful eyes not flinching before his stern glance. She now turned, and without removing her gaze, accepted her son's offered arm, and they moved slowly away, the young hussar not bestowing a look upon the object of his mother's resentment.

"Come, Leonora," muttered Sir Ralph, between his hard-set teeth, to the woman whom he had claimed as his wife; "we will go."

One instant she hesitated; one instant a light gleamed in her eyes, wild and lurid; then it was quenched as by some desperate struggle within, and bending humbly, she took his arm. The people fell back on either side as they passed through the ball-room, passed by the wrathful Countess, by the Lady Alice with her pale lips and haughty face, and out into the wide gallery, where the first object Sir Ralph's eye fell upon was the terrified visage of the old Italian woman, and just behind her Martin Rawle's tall figure.

With a wave of his hand, signing them to follow, he strode on grimly toward the right wing, his companion on his arm. They were passing the head of the grand staircase, where a cluster of powdered footmen was standing, when Harold Forrester broke through the group excitedly, and rushed up to Sir Ralph.

"Where is Lucy Norman, Sir Ralph?" he exclaimed, in a quick, peremptory tone. "They told me at her home that she was here. I have

inquired, but nobody knows any thing of her. It seems to me a pity she doesn't live here altogether; it isn't for the want of asking, I'll be bound."

He spoke with a sneer, and looked hot and angry; one of his dangerous tempers was on him, evidently. The Baronet's blue eyes glistened like steel, and he put out his mighty arm without a word, as if to sweep away the young man confronting him.

"Is it the pretty young woman—Miss Lucie?" came a full, sweet voice, with a foreign accent, staying Sir Ralph's arm.

Harold Forrester's eyes fell upon the speaker, noted the glorious features, the raven hair, and the black velvet robe and sparkling diamonds, and started, and thought of the face Lucy had told him about seeing in the window of the haunted wing.

"What about her?" asked Sir Ralph, a little huskily.

"Ah! I am taking care of her," laughed the beautiful woman on his arm.

The Baronet's brows darkened and lowered at her dangerously.

"Wait a moment, Forrester," he muttered, curtly; and then pursued his way with his companion, leaving Harold in impatience. Martin Rawle and Annina had gone on before.

When Captain Dudley Marston had seen his mother and sister into the family barouche, he bade them wait a short time, and he would rejoin them. Then he strolled into the hall leisurely, and toward Sir Ralph, who had just parted with almost the last of his guests.

The expression on the Baronet's fine features had grown hard and cruel within the last half-hour. It was the same relentless look that had been there one sunny afternoon, some years ago by Lake Como, when a would-be-assassin and wooer of another man's wife met with the penalty of his recklessness.

The young hussar sauntered up, lazily selecting a cigar from his case, as if he had nothing particular to do for a while.

"Grimspeth," he murmured sweetly, his attention apparently absorbed with his cigar-case, "a word with you, please."

Sir Ralph led the way silently into the library, closing the door after them.

"I am at your service, Captain Marston."

"Exactly. That's all that's necessary," was the calm reply. "Of course, after an affair like to-night's, matters should be simple enough. You'll manage, I suppose, to be across the water somewhere—France or Belgium, I'm not particular which—before the end of the month? A friend of mine shall call on you." And the young hussar, having lighted his cigar, sunk wearily into an easy-chair.

"I understand—perfectly!" returned the Baronet, slowly. "I don't choose to give you a meeting, Captain Marston!"

"Why not?" And the questioner yawned slightly, as if the want of interest in life tried him greatly.

"Because in respect to your sister, Lady Alice, not a word has ever left my lips that could convey an idea that I was disengaged. If the world or your mother, Lady Tremaine, jumped at conclusions, that has nothing to do with me."

"That's beside the question, Grimspeth. What I desire to know is why you should object to my arrangements?"

"I don't choose to meet you!" was the curt rejoinder.

Captain Marston knew well enough that the Baronet's practice with pistols had not been confined to shooting galleries, if any of the ugly rumors flying about the Continent the last few years could be trusted. He watched the smoke escaping in rings from his mouth, and murmured between the puffs: "Don't choose? I think, Grimspeth, you had better reconsider the matter."

"That sort of thing belongs to the past, Marston," said Sir Ralph, stirring the fire coolly with the poker. "The code of honor is changed. Men are not supposed to fight duels now-a-days, and are not blamed for refusing

to do so. It's out of date; a thing of bygone years."

"Perhaps horse-whipping is out of date," replied the young hussar, listlessly, and tossing his half-finished cigar into the fire; "but don't happen to meet me in any place of fashionable resort, Grimspeth, or, by Heaven, I'll make the experiment!"

The words slipped out as gently and evenly as if he had been paying a commonplace compliment, and he stood twirling his delicate mustache with almost a smile on his face.

The Baronet's eyes gleamed strangely, and for an instant the poker looked dangerous in his hand. Then it was replaced.

"As it happens, I am crossing to France tomorrow on business of my own. I will meet you in Belgium. You shall hear from me in a day or two. You had better leave me now, or I cannot quite answer for myself."

It was muttered in a stifled, monotonous voice, scarcely like a human being's. The young hussar smiled curiously, and without another word sauntered out of the apartment.

Harold had only waited a few minutes when Lucy appeared, and beckoning him, he followed her down some dark corridors, and out of the house by a side door into the cool, brisk air of the early morning.

They had proceeded more than half-way toward the hamlet before Harold spoke. He asked her, in a repressed voice, if she had anything to say to account for her strange conduct of that night.

Quietly and gently she told him how she and the old Italian servant had been locked in a certain strong-room in the right wing, from an early hour in the evening. There they had been kept until Martin Rawle found and released them.

No doubt he (Harold) had heard already that it was Sir Ralph's wife who had appeared so suddenly, and created such consternation among the guests. She it was who had so unexpectedly locked them in the strong-room, and thus been able to escape their vigilance.

"So it was Sir Ralph's wife—the opera-singer, I suppose?" mused Harold, thinking of the beautiful face that had smiled on him from the Baronet's side.

He had forgotten his wrath for the moment in his surprise, but now he turned on the girl impatiently.

"And what business had you with this mad-woman, or in the house at all, for the matter of that? You are not Sir Ralph's servant!"

"Harold, don't be unkind!"

And pretty Mistress Lucy looked up in his face beseechingly, and laid a little white hand on his arm. But he only shook it off churlishly, and walked on faster.

"You know, Harold, how liberal and generous the Squire's family have always been to all of us for generations past; and how father looks at it. He would do anything for them." What, then, would he say if I were to refuse to perform the slight services up at the Hall that I can do?"

They had passed out of the park, and were almost within view of the "Silver Trout."

The wind sighed freshly through the bare branches of the trees, and the night was clear and cloudless. In front of them lay the little churchyard, and the small, white tombstones looked dim and peaceful beneath the silent starlight. Under the lowly, ivy-crowned tower of the picturesque church, whose outline could be faintly traced now, rested all that had been mortal of generations of Grimspeths, as the marble monuments, tables and escutcheons within could testify.

Harold paused, with his hand on the little latch-gate of the churchyard, and gazed toward the "Silver Trout." There was a solitary lamp burning in one of the lower windows, and evidently some one—mine host, most probably—was waiting up for the absent daughter of the house.

"Lucy," said the young man, a little fret-

fully still, "it's past three o'clock. I've been waiting for you since eight last evening. I daresay you think me cross; but it's your own fault. This is the third or fourth time you've not kept your appointment. If you loved me only half as well as I love you, you would manage matters differently, I think."

She nestled close to his side, and even in the dim starlight he could see that the blue eyes raised to his so gently were welling over with tears.

"Don't scold me any more, Harold. Forgive me," she whispered. "If you only knew how much I loved you, how tenderly and dearly, you would not talk so. Come down to-morrow night—that is, this night—there's a darling! See; you're making quite a baby of me," as she wiped up the little rivulets of tears that were coursing down her pretty cheeks.

He couldn't resist the soft, sweet pleading, bent over her fondly, and kissed her.

Then they went toward the inn, and mine host welcomed them in wondering, half-sleepy accents. A few minutes later, Harold, mounted on the mare, was setting off on his dark journey to Chilhampton.

CHAPTER IX.

CHANGING SCENES.

THE night following the ball at Grimspeth Hall was dark, wet and gloomy. The wind howled round the gable-ends of the old "Silver Trout," and roared in its wide chimneys.

It was late before Harold Forrester drew rein in front of the cheery inn, after his ride from Chilhampton. He dismounted and entered, to find a scene of excitement and confusion going on.

A babel of voices issued from the bar-parlor; mine host, alone, sitting in front of the fire calmly, only a little paler than usual. From time to time he read and re-read a short letter, roughly written in pencil, that he held in his hand.

"Mr. Norman," cried Harold, excitedly, close to his ear, "where's Lucy?"

Mine host turned round uneasily, with very little of the joviality left in his round face.

"Gone—gone away!" he replied, a little thickly.

"I knew it—I was sure of it!" gasped Harold, between his teeth. "I saw her not an hour since, on the road to Chilhampton. There were others in the carriage, and one of them was that scoundrel Grimspeth!"

Mine host started quickly to his feet, all his color returning with a hot flush.

"Look ye, Harold Forrester! Ye may speak what ye like o' me and my daughter; but as sure as ye say a word again' the Squeer, or the Squeer's family, I'll—I'll—"

And the old man paused, with clenched fists, glaring furiously at Harold.

"My Lucy, she ha' wrote me, and said as how the Squeer he want her, and right glad be I for her to go. The Squeer's a gentleman, and, come what may, my Lucy is safe with him. I warn ye—not a word again' him!" And mine host sunk back in his chair, looking very wroth and out of breath.

"Do you know where she's gone?" asked Harold, repressing his anger with difficulty.

"I don't know, and I don't care. She's with the Squeer."

A few moments after Harold was galloping up the broad walk to Grimspeth Hall, like a madman. There were very few lights in the windows, and it was some time before he could gain admission. When he did, he found his worst suspicions verified. The Baronet had set off that night, taking Lucy, his wife, and the old Italian woman with him. To his surprise, he heard also that Martin Rawle accompanied them.

The following morning's post brought him a letter from Lucy, addressed from a hotel in London. It spoke love and affection for him in every word, and assured him that she would be back in ten days; but not a syllable did it say about her destination, nor who she was traveling with.

He flung it down and ground it under his heel, his face livid with anger.

"It's all a blind! She loves him, and thinks to hoodwink me! Curse him!—curse them both! She is guilty!"

"What does the doctor say about her, Miss Lucy?"

"He gives no hope of her recovery. He says she may linger two or three days longer, and then die. When did you say Sir Ralph was coming back, Mr. Rawle?"

"Either to-morrow or the next day. He has been to Grimspeth again since we saw him."

They had met casually that afternoon on the low, broad veranda, that ran the length of the new-built, handsome house in one of the suburbs of Paris. It was early spring here, and already the branches were beginning to bud, and the birds to twitter.

A week had elapsed since they left Grimspeth. On arriving at Calais the Baronet had parted with them, saying that he had important business in Belgium. Before doing so he had placed them in the care of a French gentleman, whom he had telegraphed to come from Paris to meet them. He was a doctor of some celebrity, in whose charge Sir Ralph had determined to leave his wife. It was his house she was at now, with her old nurse, Annina; and Martin Rawle and Lucy were staying there also, until the Baronet's return.

Annina was sick unto death now, and Lucy had been obliged to take upon herself all the duties toward the wife of Sir Ralph Grimspeth which the old woman used to perform.

A great change had come over Lady Grimspeth since she had been under the doctor's roof. Her wild outbursts, in which the light of reason seemed totally quenched, had disappeared altogether, and been replaced by a melancholy brooding humor. She would sit for hours together, apparently wrapt in her own thoughts, with no observance of outward things. The doctor hailed it as a sign that the mental powers were regaining their equilibrium.

Two more days elapsed, and the old Italian servant died. Meanwhile the Baronet had not appeared; and Lucy, who had been so much employed, she had not even had the opportunity of writing a letter to Harold, was getting anxious to be released from her charge, and return to England. For, true to her promise to Sir Ralph, and at a few minutes' notice, she had accompanied his wife to Paris, and engaged to stay with her a few days until she was settled, Annina being too old to be of much use. On the Baronet's arrival, Lucy was to go back with Martin Rawle.

A fortnight passed, and Sir Ralph was still absent, neither had they heard from him. Rawle made arrangements, and the remains of the old Italian nurse were buried.

Late on the afternoon of the fourteenth day after their arrival, Lucy, who had been availing herself of a few minutes' fresh air on the veranda, entered the apartment where her charge usually sat. It was growing dusk; but as she glanced round, a scene of confusion met her eyes, and Lady Grimspeth was not visible.

At that moment Doctor Josselin presented himself hurriedly, exclaiming, "She has fled!"

"Impossible!" cried Lucy. "Why do you think so, doctor?"

"Because M. Picarde, our neighbor, tells me he saw a coach drive away from here a short time since, with several parcels and bags outside, and a lady, heavily veiled, inside."

Diamonds and jewel-cases of great value had entirely vanished. Two or three drawers had been turned topsy-turvy, and most of the things evidently carried off in a couple of trunks. A cash-box, in which Mr. Martin Rawle kept a considerable sum of money for his master, had been wrenched open, and rifled of its contents; and, looking round now, Lucy perceived innumerable evidences of hasty flight.

"Madame has done it herself," continued

the doctor. "M. Picarde says the coach was hailed from this window; and, nobody being in view, the driver carried the trunks out, and put them up outside, and then drove away to the station. He heard the lady give the direction. It was all done so quietly, our neighbor thought nothing could be wrong. But he took the man's number on his vehicle—No. 447."

Martin Rawle entered the room at that moment, hearing the excited voices within. Lucy rapidly told him what had occurred.

"And now what can we do?" she asked. "Sir Ralph will be in a fearful way."

"We must follow her," said Martin Rawle, decidedly.

Within half an hour they had started, and before the middle of the following day had pursued her as far Boulogne. Here all trace was lost, notwithstanding their inquiries. Doctor Josselin was of opinion she had returned to England *via* Folkestone.

They returned to Paris to get the assistance of good detectives.

On arrival at the doctor's house, they found that Sir Ralph had returned only a short time before them. His features looked worn and pale, and he heard their news in grim silence.

After a few minutes' stern thought, he muttered savagely, "I will look for her myself. I will hunt the world through till I find her!"

Martin Rawle and Lucy returned to Grimspeth the next day. They had been away nearly three weeks.

A solitary rider was pursuing his way slowly along the broad avenue through Grimspeth Park one night. The moon was up, and her bright, silvery beams found their way through the overhanging trees, making a pretty checkered pattern across the road.

It was Harold Forrester, and a fortnight had elapsed since the flight of his lady-love, and he had neither seen nor heard a word of her.

He had not been in the "Silver Trout" since that night on which he had told mine host his opinion on the matter; but he had come several times to Grimspeth, hoping to gain tidings of Lucy. His suspicions, he thought, now, were only too well verified. The ten days she had named had passed, and her absence was prolonged.

He raised his eyes toward the galloping sound of horse's hoofs, that was bearing down on him from the Hall end of the avenue. On the horseman came down the moonlit vista, looking like a cathedral aisle with the floods of silver falling between its massive pillars. In the next instant Harold's blood boiled in his veins, as he recognized in the gaunt, towering figure approaching him, Sir Ralph Grimspeth, on his favorite gray charger.

"Is that you, Forrester?" asked the Baronet, in his usual calm tones, reining up. "I'm glad I've met you."

The moonlight fell full on Harold's features, and all the passion and revenge that he had been hoarding up the last fortnight burst forth on them now.

"So am I, Ralph Grimspeth! I'd have given my life to have known whom you were bearing away to her ruin, poor dupe, that night I passed you! Hound! where is Lucy Norman?"

Sir Ralph sat in the shade quite motionless, but there was a strange, thrilling quietness in his voice.

"Do you know, Forrester, that for less than you've just said I left a man scarce three days since dying on the Belgian border? Take care; I'm not a man given to think much of consequences!"

"I've heard it!" laughed Harold, wildly. "Poor young Marston's but one of many! You've made wreck of lives enough; one, more or less, is nothing to you."

Sir Ralph sat like a statue, still in the shade.

"You've ruined mine; but, by Heaven! this night I'll make you answer for it! You don't go"—seizing the Baronet's reins furiously—

"until I know where to find her! Tell me, you scoundrel, or—"

He stopped; a blow with a heavy riding-switch across his knuckles compelled him to let go his hold. A sudden gleam in the moon-shine, two blinding cuts over his face, a deep-muttered oath from the Baronet, and he was alone.

He reeled in his saddle; a passionate cry, like some wild beast's, rung out on the still night air; and then, through all that mad pain, he caught the sound of horse's hoofs growing faint and fainter in the distance, and knew that pursuit after that famous stretching gallop would be worse than useless on his sorry mare.

And from that date Harold Forrester disappeared from Grimspeth and Chilhampton alike, and neither his aunt nor any one could answer where he had gone, nor what had become of him.

CHAPTER X

"WHAT IS MY LOVE DOING?"

"Hi! hi! Where are you runnin' to, yer fool?"

It was done in an instant.

A dull thud, a groan of agony, and the man lay pale and unconscious in the road.

The cabman who had addressed him thus, and then driven over him, descended from his perch; his fare got out, and the sufferer was lifted to the curb-stone, where a small crowd sprung up like magic, and hemmed him in.

"Run over his legs, didn't yer?"

"Think so. Nearly tossed me off the box, he did! People will git in the way so! Coming, sir!" to his fare, who, after one glance at the victim of reckless driving, had resumed his seat inside again.

"Cabby" mounted to his perch, and away rattled the "hansom" on its danger-dealing career.

A neat-looking little brougham passed—so neat, indeed, that only an experienced eye could have detected that it was owned by a job-master, and was a hired vehicle.

Its occupant, gazing through the windows, caught sight of that pale face on the curb-stone, with the little crowd around it, and with the quick intuition of the female sex, understood the nature of the accident in that glance. She pulled the check-string hastily, and the brougham drew up beside the group on the pavement.

"He is a friend of mine. Is he much hurt?" she asked, with somewhat of a foreign accent, and leaning out of the carriage window.

A few of the bystanders volunteered the information that his legs were broken, and a few others that the hospital people would know better what was the matter with him; and then, like good Samaritans, they stood looking on, and carefully keeping a breath of fresh air from him.

"I will take him with me; he must not lie here. Help lift him in, Charles," exclaimed the lady to a raw-boned youth in a chocolate livery, seated beside the coachman.

With no great show of alacrity the youth obeyed. The door was opened, the lady made room, and the sufferer was laid lengthways on the hinder seat, with the assistance of one or two men, who took their hands out of their pockets on that occasion only.

The neat-looking brougham rolled away, and after passing along a few quiet streets, it stopped in front of a house in a retired, semi-aristocratic square.

Then the lady had the injured man lifted out, and conveyed up-stairs and laid on a sofa in a comfortable sitting-room, while Charles was dispatched for the nearest surgeon.

Consciousness returned to him, and he lay groaning there, in too much pain to care where he was, or who was with him. Upon examination, the surgeon declared that there was a compound fracture of one leg, and that the other had escaped with a severe contusion. The patient must be put to bed, and the limb placed in splints at once.

"Do not trouble yourself, Mr. Forrester," said some one whom he could not see. "I am your friend, and you shall be well taken care of."

It was a woman's voice that came to him from behind the sofa, sweet and full, but with just that foreign accent that had been noticeable when she had addressed the crowd gathered round him in the street.

Without more ado, he was conveyed up-stairs gently to a bedroom, and the surgeon set his leg.

An old woman appeared on the scene to nurse and minister to his wants, and for the next fortnight he saw no face but hers and that of the medical man. In vain he questioned her about the name of his benefactress; she either did not know, or seemed not to know, any more about the matter than he did. All she could say was, that the lady who engaged her had apartments in the house and paid her liberally.

It was nearly three weeks before he was able, with the assistance of the nurse, to move onto a sofa in his room, and lie there wrapped in a dressing-gown.

During that time he had never desired to have a single message sent to any friend or relation concerning his whereabouts. He seemed to be, as he himself said, quite friendless.

He lay beneath a wide-open window, for even in London the early summer air was balmy and fragrant.

Books and magazines in plenty were supplied him, and he was listlessly engaged over one of these now.

Presently the door opened quietly, and thinking it was the nurse he did not look up. Then he became aware of some one bending over him, and laying the book aside, a face met his gaze that sent the blood tingling through his veins. Surely he could not be mistaken? And in his astonishment he raised himself on his elbow, as the magnificent features and black velvety eyes smiled down on him.

"Lady Grimspeth!" he gasped, sinking back.

"Yes, Mr. Forrester. Is that anything wonderful?" she laughed. "So you remember me after once seeing me only? Don't stir yourself." And she brought a chair, and seated herself opposite him, watching him narrowly.

For he turned deadly pale, and a strange, wild look had come into his eyes.

"Where is your husband? Is he—is he in the house?" he demanded, breathlessly.

"Oh, no!" she said lightly. "You have not heard the latest news, Mr. Forrester. Sir Ralph and I have parted company. He is looking for me, and I for him. Strange, isn't it?" And she laughed again, but not a pleasant laugh, so hard and grating.

It thrilled through Harold Forrester harshly as he lay on the sofa; and he glanced at her with curiosity.

"And it is you, Lady Grimspeth, I have to thank, then, for—" he commenced.

"Say nothing about it!" she put in, promptly. "I had my reasons, you may be sure!"

"But how—how do you come here, if you will pardon my asking? I understood you were—you were—not very well," he faltered.

"You mean that I was a lunatic, as they call it? Speak it out Mr. Forrester! Mad is the word! Would it surprise you to hear that I never was mad? It is the truth!"

She bent forward, speaking quite calmly and earnestly, and her face wore the grave and haughty expression natural to it.

Harold acknowledged to himself that if she were mad now, there was considerable method about her madness.

"It is the truth!" she continued, slowly; "and the reasons and causes that led to the general belief about me are best known to myself. The truth was known to Ralph Grimspeth, but he kept it secret as the grave!" And her eyes flashed wickedly as she said it.

"But about yourself, Mr. Forrester. How do you suppose I came to know your name, and who you were? I need not ask you if

you remember Lucy Norman—pretty Lucy, as I used to call her. Poor child!"

Again Harold Forrester's face paled, and the same wild light gleamed from his eyes as before, while speaking.

"Do you know anything of her? Can you tell me where she is?"

"The only news I can give you is sad news, Mr. Forrester. But tell me first—have you seen her since she left Grimspeth?"

"Never! Not one single instant! I have sought her everywhere; have followed her to France—there I lost sight of her. I came to London a month ago, hearing that Sir Ralph had been seen here. I knew she was with him. Can you tell why she was with him?"

"I can; but my best answer will be to beg you not to press your question. Lucy Norman accompanied me to Paris. She spoke to me much concerning yourself. I little thought then how near ruin she was; but I might have known better, while Sir Ralph Grimspeth was in her company. It is too late now."

She watched him furtively under her long, dark lashes as she spoke, and a cunning, evil expression was on her features.

"Curse him!" groaned Harold. "From the very first I knew how it would be. I would to Heaven I could meet him now! He should not escape me again."

"Do you know whom you are speaking of, Mr. Forrester?"

"Lady Grimspeth, I beg your pardon. You must consider my provocation. It may be only a little matter to him, but to me—"

"In short, you hate Sir Ralph Grimspeth," she interrupted, firmly. "Do you think I have cause to love him? Do you think seven years of forced imprisonment—seven years' solitude—seven years' dreariness—seven of the sweetest years of a woman's life stolen from her, are cause sufficient to make a woman love her husband? Mr. Forrester, if you hate him, what must I do?"

Looking at the glowing, passionate face appealing to him now, he scarcely knew what to think. If he were to believe his senses, this was a sane woman; and if so, and the Baronet had incarcerated his wife on a false plea, he could understand how intense her feelings might be.

"It is not my purpose to give you a long account of the sufferings and wrongs I have endured," and her tones were very earnest now. "Enough that I hate Sir Ralph Grimspeth as deeply as you can do; enough that I am determined to be revenged on him for his cruelty; that I have some one in my pay on his track; and when I saw you in the street I knew your face at once, and remembering the injuries you had received at his hands, thought you might make common cause with me when you had recovered. And now, Mr. Forrester, you are in possession of the reason of my apparent kindness to you."

The bitter, vengeful passions that had been smoldering in Harold's breast blazed up anew at her words. To make the man suffer who had made him suffer; who had destroyed the happiness of his life; who had struck him like a hound, and ridden away, leaving him impotent—this had been the dream of the last three months, and without pause to consider, he did make common cause with his temptress. An inward quail seized him while she proceeded unfolding her plans to him as far as she thought proper; but he had given in his adhesion, and drowned all scruples in the cruel thirst for revenge.

In less than a week after, he was able to comply with the desire of Lady Grimspeth, and, with assistance, descend to the sitting-room. There he found the man she had referred to, named Borkwood—Doctor Borkwood, he called himself—who informed them that he had discovered the Baronet was in London, and gave them his address.

Doctor Borkwood stated that what Lady Grimspeth required of him he was in the habit of doing very rarely, speaking with a kind of unctuous piety, as if he were imperiling his

soul for the first time in his existence. It was a matter of considerable trouble and of considerable risk, and consequently a considerable amount of money would be required to carry it through. Being pressed to state a sum, the amount he named was certainly very considerable, and Lady Grimspeth bit her lips. However, she said that a portion of the demand should be paid down, and that on the completion of their plans, she should enter into possession of her husband's property, and the remainder would be handed over.

But notwithstanding his injuries, a gloomy uneasiness settled on Harold Forrester when matters had been arranged thus, and he had listened in silence.

The summer sun streamed into a comfortable but slightly faded sitting-room, and onto the bowed head of a young girl, the ruddy beams seeming to linger tenderly about her golden-brown tresses. She had sunk upon the floor, and her face was buried in her hands, from between which heavy sobs burst forth. An elderly lady, whose dark hair was already dashed with gray, sat in a chair beside her, watching with a look of gentle commiseration.

"Oh, Miss Forrester, what can I do? Is there no way of finding him? That he should think me faithless—worse! Harold, Harold, how could you? It will break my heart, it will! And there is nothing to be done?"

"Patience, my child—patience," said the old lady, softly. "It is a heavy trial for you; but he will come back again. Wait and trust."

Poor Mistress Lucy! The trial was heavy for her, and the sorrow almost more than her aching little heart could endure. The weeks had gone by since her return, and she had heard nothing from her absent sweetheart, and now she had come to Chilhampton to seek news from his aunt.

Passing the churchyard on her way back to the "Silver Trout" that lovely summer's afternoon, she paused awhile by the little gate. She thought of the last time she had seen him—just there; of his fond love and dark, tender eyes; and again the ready tears bedewed the soft cheeks, which not even grief could rob of their rose tints, and she murmured, dreamily, "Ah! what is my love doing?—where is he now?"

Ah! what was he doing? It is fortunate, perhaps, for true hearts that distance provides barriers to loving eyes; just as it is better that the secrets of the future are veiled from mortal sight.

CHAPTER XI.

ENTRAPPED.

MILBURY is an old-fashioned provincial town some forty miles southwest of London. It is a very sleepy place, notwithstanding a line of railway has run through it for the last twenty years. It seems to have made up its mind, long ago, to settle down contentedly among its smiling corn-fields and plenteous fruit orchards, and let the whirl of modern civilization rush past it unheeded.

Doctor Borkwood was a man of some position at Milbury. His respectability was undoubted, and as he constantly required the attendance of a portion of the medical fraternity of that town, and paid handsomely, the portion in question spoke highly in favor of his humanity and ability. And it was very necessary that this should be the case, and also that the local magistrates should have complete confidence in him, for Doctor Borkwood kept a private lunatic asylum.

Some quarter of a mile out of Milbury was the Doctor's residence, and a very snug little house it was, nestled down amid its leafy surroundings. It lay a little back from the high road, and its grounds extended behind right away to the mill-stream. The paper-mill at Milbury was a place of much importance, and was situated only five minutes' walk from the Doctor's property, further down stream.

But between the snug residence and the mill-stream, a long two-storied building reared itself, with its two wings projecting toward the water.

This was the Doctor's lunatic asylum, duly licensed, and from time to time duly visited and looked over—or overlooked—by the commission of county magistrates, after plentiful regaling of their inner men at the snug residence with the Doctor's fine old crusted port, especially kept for that purpose.

Very humane and gentle was the system Doctor Borkwood had adopted; and the worthy magistrates, during their tour of inspection—only a matter of form, of course—nodded their heads with approval, and smacked their lips after the crusted port.

"Persuasion is better than force," the Doctor would smilingly assure them; and the good gentlemen would say over their dinner-table in the evening, "That Borkwood is an excellent fellow; as tender as a lamb with his patients."

And, indeed, as far as Milbury knew, scenes of violence never occurred within the walls of the asylum. It is true there was a padded room; but it was extremely rare for it to be required. And if at times an attendant—of whom the Doctor had some dozen or more—appeared with a black eye or swollen lip, it was accounted for by the playful propensities of one of the patients; and, of course, under Doctor Borkwood's system, retaliation was a thing unknown.

One afternoon, warm and dull, and when the atmosphere was hazy with the summer's heat, a gentleman, who had just come by the London express, emerged from Milbury Station, and, after making a few inquiries, arrived at the Doctor's snug residence.

He marched up to the front door, rung the bell, and, handing a card to the servant, with "Sir Ralph Grimspeth, Bart.," inscribed thereon, was shown into the drawing-room.

Here he found a stranger sitting in one of the bow-windows, who eyed him curiously as he entered. He was evidently waiting to see some one, for he was clumsily turning over an album before him.

He was a middle-sized, thick-set man, with sullen features and short, lank hair, that grew low down on his narrow forehead.

The Baronet said "Good afternoon" in his courteous manner; but the stranger only acknowledged the salutation with a slight nod, and returned to his album.

Bestowing no further notice on him, Sir Ralph Grimspeth commenced pacing up and down the length of the apartment. Presently, growing tired of waiting, he went to the bell and pulled it; then he resumed his walk.

In a minute or two a portly, bewhiskered, red-faced gentleman, wearing spectacles, presented himself. He glanced timidly across at the stranger as the door closed, and then turned toward the Baronet, who had stopped short.

"Doctor Borkwood, I presume?" said Sir Ralph.

"N—no; oh, no, my good sir! Don't be alarmed, pray! I sha'n't detain you many minutes."

And the portly gentleman looked far more alarmed of the two.

The Baronet could scarcely forbear smiling.

"I can assure you I have no occasion to feel alarmed, that I know of," he said calmly. "Pray, what do you require with me?"

"Oh, nothing—nothing of consequence," replied the portly gentleman, hurriedly, and settling his spectacles to gaze at the Baronet, as he would at some wild animal at the Zoo. "You look in very good health; a trifle pale, perhaps. I hope you will soon recover, my good sir."

The smile faded from Sir Ralph's features, and the blue eyes opened wide with surprise.

"Recover! What are you talking about, sir?" he demanded.

"Oh, nothing! I quite agree with you; don't say any more about it!" exclaimed the

portly gentleman, backing precipitately toward the door. "A very warm day, is it not? Good-afternoon!"

And the portly gentleman disappeared without another word.

The Baronet resumed his walk up and down the room in grim silence; the stranger in the bow-window still toying with the album, but casting furtive glances from under his beetling brows at his companion.

Again the door opened, and this time two gentlemen appeared, and faced Sir Ralph as he paused. One looked a comely middle-aged English gentleman, and the other a little, old, weazen-faced man, who stooped very much, and carried a silver snuff-box in his hand.

The Baronet surveyed them without a word, and with a severe expression on his face, then crossed the room, and pulled at the bell violently.

"To look at him, I should have thought he was the very last man in the world to be out of his mind," murmured Mr. Harvey, who was a magistrate—one of the Great Unpaid.

"In course, sir; but they're downright cunnin'. It's on'y men of 'sperience can tell 'em by the look."

The little, weazen-faced man and the magistrate passed out together, crossed the hall, and entered a room where sat Doctor Borkwood and the portly gentleman.

"A bad case—a very bad case!" said little Doctor Duffers, consequentially, in reply to Doctor Borkwood's question. "What do you think about it, Pauncefort?" turning to the portly gentleman.

"Oh, Doctor Pauncefort's been telling me he considers the case positively dangerous," put in the keeper of the lunatic asylum, with a sad shake of his head. "He thinks if he had stayed a few moments longer with the patient he would have broken out into violence."

"I do, most certainly," said the portly gentleman. And then he compared notes aside with little Doctor Duffers.

"I think, Mr. Harvey," said Borkwood, "we can now settle this little matter. The unfortunate wife—Lady Grimspeth—is in the next room; but it will scarcely be necessary to see her, I think. She is very much overcome with her trouble. A young friend of the family, who was brought up with the afflicted gentleman, and knows him intimately, is now with her, and will act for her. I must tell you, in accordance with my usual maxim, that 'persuasion is better than force.' The patient has been induced to come here, expecting to meet his wife. Such little subterfuges I look upon as pardonable when they prevent a resort to violence."

"Certainly, Doctor Borkwood, certainly," said the magistrate, nodding. "Your arrangements are always excellent."

And then Harold Forrester put in an appearance. The certificate was signed, and the little plot of the Lady Grimspeth carried to all but completion.

Shortly after, the magistrate and the two doctors took their leave, and leisurely strolled away from Doctor Borkwood's snug residence along the little carriage drive, convinced that they had done their duty.

Harold Forrester and Lady Grimspeth were in a room that faced toward the mill-stream, and the long, two-storied building that reared itself above it. They heard footsteps in the hall, and Doctor Borkwood's voice, speaking confidentially.

"Will you follow me, Sir Ralph? The lady is in the asylum at present. We had more accommodation for her there, until your arrival."

Presently, from the window, they saw them crossing the grounds side by side toward the building at the further end. Some distance behind them, almost out of sight, followed the stranger.

Harold Forrester's face flushed, and he moved about restlessly; but there gleamed in the lady's face a diabolical light, as if exulting in her triumph.

"Ah!" she cried, as she saw their shadows die away beneath the dark portal. "Now am I satisfied! And you, my poor Stephano, are avenged!"

Harold looked at her in surprise; for her words were uttered very passionately, and in a language unknown to him.

It was half an hour before Doctor Borkwood returned, and then he looked very pale, and his usual pious intonation had left him. He trembled slightly, and merely said, as he conducted them across the hall to the front door: "I am a man of my word, Lady Grimspeeth, or I would not carry this job through. Three of my attendants will have to be on sick leave for the next month; and we have a fearful case in hand."

CHAPTER XII.

AMONG THE EVENING SHADOWS.

A SOFT, golden evening in August. The air is still—hushed, save the occasional twitter of a rest-seeking bird, and hum of a home-wending bee; save, also, that a young man, who is seated listlessly on a cross-barred gate, is kicking the third bar as an accompaniment to his thoughts.

He has arrived thus far—two miles—on the high road from Chilhampton to Grimspeeth, and now has called a halt to himself, to question the object of his proceeding any further.

He whistles a little tune, softly and sadly; and as he gazes up the silent, white road, which is beginning to look shadowy and pleasantly cool after the day's sunshine, fancies he sees a shadow taking the air on its own account in the early dusk; and, indeed, it is approaching him.

Presently, it is more pronounced than its kindred; and then, by stages, develops from a formless shadow into a human form, just as a light, firm "tread, tread," becomes audible, and the figure draws nearer to him; and though its charming, girlish outline sends the blood surging up to his heart in one big wave, he does not stir.

Only he sits as one spellbound, gazing till it has glided quite out of shadowland into the substance, and is close before him.

And when the sweet, beseeching face, with its blue eyes liquid in their tears, and its rosy lips quivering in their emotion, looking so like an angel's with its aureole of golden-brown hair, is lifted to his so tenderly, and the white hands are clasped as the little pent-up cry "Oh, Harold!" bursts from her, he just heaves a deep, yearning sob, that tells more of pain than many an anguished groan, and without another sign drops from his seat, and flies past her down the high road.

On, he cares not whither, until breathless and then he flings himself on the soft turf by the roadside, stifling his great sobs by burying his head on his arms.

He is alone now, and lies there until he grows calmer; then by-and-by he thinks it is growing late, and that he must return to Chilhampton, so raises his head.

In front of him, sitting on the turf but a few yards away, is she who came to him out of the evening shadows. The tears still glisten on her gentle face, and she is gazing at him mournfully. She must have crept there while his face was hidden, and sat there since in silence.

His teeth are clenched, as if to keep his tongue from speaking; and he is about to rise and move off wearily, when she bends forward and whispers, in soft, earnest tones, "Harold, my love, why do you wish to leave me? Have I done any thing—any thing to displease you?"

He staggers to his feet and leans against the field-fence close by. He feels he must escape the fascination of those eyes.

"Your conscience should be the best judge of what you have done! My prayer has been never to meet you—never to set my eyes on you again!"

He speaks huskily, and with an effort. For a few moments she does not reply, but suppresses a little rising sob.

"I know what you think, Harold. Your poor aunt told me of your cruel suspicions only a few days before she died. Had you seen her alive again, you might not be doubting me now."

He is silent, but there is a great wild feeling of hope springing up within him.

"Won't you speak to me, Harold? Do you wish me to protest my innocence?"

Her tones are very low and reproachful, and she looks away up the white, dim high road, the tears almost blinding her eyes.

"What were you doing away with *him*?" he asks, brokenly.

"Do you mean the Squire? I went to accompany his wife. He took her away to France, and her old nurse was unwell. He went no further than Calais with us. Then he placed us in charge of a doctor, and we went on to Paris. I didn't see him again till I set off on my return three weeks after."

She rises, and goes and stands before him.

"And why—why did you not come and see me and tell me all this? It is a month since I returned to Chilhampton."

"Was it for me to come, Harold? I knew I had nothing to be ashamed of. Besides, father wouldn't let me."

A great struggle has been going on within him between his doubts and his hopes. He feels as he gazes at those wistful eyes that he has behaved like a brute.

"Lucy, what have you to say to me?"

Her heart goes out to him with a little, low cry, and the next instant she is in his arms, and her head buried on his breast.

"Forgive me, love!" he murmurs in her ear; and her face is raised readily, with ever such a little touch of sauciness in the deep blue eyes, for his kiss.

The evening shadows have crept down close about them now. Presently they are strolling along the road toward Grimspeeth, arm-in-arm.

"I feel I must scold you the least little bit in the world, Harold," she says, squeezing his arm.

But he seems lost in thought, and when he speaks, the tones of his voice are quite grave.

"Listen to me, love. Some underhand business has been going on somewhere. I am not quite of such little faith as you think, perhaps. In London I met Lady Grimspeeth, or, rather, she found me, and—"

"Lady Grimspeeth?"

"Yes; but let me finish, Lucy. She confirmed my worst suspicions; but, mind, they were not convictions at that time. She told me herself that she had left you and Sir Ralph Grimspeeth together—that she had fled from him. I can scarcely imagine her object in telling me so; but she did. She had quite enough complaint against the Baronet without that. What a piece of villainy of his to lock up a sane woman, and his wife, too!"

"But, Harold, Lady Grimspeeth is not sane. I was with her three weeks while she was under one of the cleverest men in Paris. He says hers is a very curious phase of mental disease. At times she appears perfectly right, and then it will come on quite unexpectedly, and she will rave for a day or more, quite out of her senses. The physician said that during the intervals she knows she is subject to these paroxysms, but, like all persons in that condition, is very cunning, and can even put them off for a time if her thoughts are attracted by other things. To do this is his system, and she was much improving under it when she fled."

"Lucy, you horrify me! Then her husband is not to blame for confining her?"

"No; certainly not. But why, Harold? What do you know of Lady Grimspeeth?"

He pauses, and she can see, notwithstanding the twilight, that his face has grown unusually pale, and there is a strange look of horror on it.

"I fear I have committed a great crime," he mutters, hoarsely. "But no. He struck me, and jeered me. He only has his due."

"What is it, Harold? What troubles you?"

Then he tells her how he met the Baronet that moonlight night on the broad avenue, when the fiend of jealousy was gnawing at his heart-strings, and how he suffered at the Baronet's hands. And he grows vindictive and hot again as he recalls the scene.

"He cares for neither man nor law, Lucy. He owned that he had as good as been the destroyer of poor young Marston. You heard how he was killed in a duel in Belgium, I suppose; and people about here say, truly enough, that it was Grimspeeth who shot him!"

"Hush, hush, dear Harold! Sir Ralph has much to account for, but we may not judge him. He has suffered much—his life has been soured; I understand so far. I believe he has loved his wife from the very first but too well. Her affliction has been a life-long trouble to him. Such trials falling on strong, fierce spirits like his only harden them."

"He loves his wife, you say?" exclaims Harold Forrester, vacantly.

"Yes; I'm sure of it. But where is he, Harold? There have been great changes at the Hall since you were at Grimspeeth. Lady Grimspeeth is there, and she is much better than she used to be, but still has these attacks. Martin Rawle says she shut herself up in the strong-room there for two whole days and nights last week, without any food. I have offered to stay with her, but she won't see me, even. And in the Squire's absence she has demanded that the management of his affairs shall be handed over to her, and Martin has been obliged to consent. The property is terribly hampered with debt, you know, owing to Sir Ralph's extravagance, and yet she is raising more money on it. Father and the other tenants are in a fearful way; but what can they do while Sir Ralph is away? No one knows where he is."

Harold Forrester knows now that he has been a dupe—that through his groundless jealousy and irate feelings he has been betrayed into committing a foul sin. And remorse and horror seize on him with tenfold violence.

Through the evening shadows they sight now the scattered lights of Grimspeeth hamlet. The "Silver Trout" is to be distinguished by the broader, ruddy band that streams from it.

He pauses in their walk, and turns to her.

"Lucy, my love, don't ask for explanations now. I am suffering torments. You shall know all before long. I have been very wrong, and must do all I can to undo my wickedness. I will not come in to-night; I will come and see you another day, as soon as possible. Trust me, my girl, I shall never forget your true heart, your honest love, after this night."

She sees he is in great excitement, and forbears to question him. She murmurs her sympathy gently, and then goes away a little sorrowfully toward the "Silver Trout," like the brave, trusting little mistress that she is.

He watches her trim, shapely figure disappearing among the shadows again, and then turns into the park, and makes for the bailiff's house.

Martin Rawle is in, and what Harold Forrester has to say is put in very few words.

"I will be with you in less than an hour, Mr. Rawle, and you will return with me to-night to Chilhampton. We can start by the early train." And he goes away up the broad avenue, dim and solemn in the starlight now, toward the Hall.

That night he meets Lady Grimspeeth. What passed between them never transpired; but the few servants who were about the place say that her voice was heard at times in loud and withering accents of fury and scorn. At length, pale and angry, he was seen in the library where they have been, and he rushes from the house with

CHAPTER

REVENGED AT

"How far is it to Down?"

"What, Muster Harvey?"

on fower mile. But if you want to see Muster Harvey hisself, he be in town, to-day."

"I do. Where is he to be seen?"

"He've been at the Sessions House all t' morning; but now it be a' moist toime he should go whome."

It was outside Milbury station, and Harold Forrester had gained this piece of information from the rustic railway porter. He had no time to lose. He rewarded the man, and was proceeding toward the market-place, where the Sessions House was situated, when a fly, hired at the station hotel, passed him at a rapid trot. He recognized instantly the tall, superb figure, closely veiled, that was seated behind the driver.

A few minutes later he was in front of the Sessions House. He found the magistrate on the steps, preparing to mount his horse; but after Harold's first few hurried words, he led the way into the building again, and listened attentively.

At first, he raised his eyebrows incredulously, for it seemed to him impossible that the bland, kind-hearted, port-regaling Doctor Borkwood should be anything else than the local magistracy chose to consider him.

Ten minutes afterward, however, Mr. Harvey, with a grave face, had decided to accompany Harold, and they were on their way to the asylum, followed by a sergeant and a couple of constables.

Doctor Borkwood was troubled in mind. He had not long finished dinner, and stood now on the stone steps leading into the asylum, sunning himself in the afternoon sun, and picking his teeth. There was a decided scowl on his usually smooth features, and his white teeth glistened ominously in the light.

The fact was, for the first time in his experience, he had met a patient who had proved too much for him and for his redoubtable system.

He was fairly puzzled. Before this he had had obstreperous, pertinacious cases; but never one like the present. Two fearful scenes there had been; but these the Doctor was used to.

The first was on the day the patient arrived; the second three days after, when he had tried to escape. Since then, mute, impassive, watchful had been his demeanor, doing what he was bid, but never suffering a single word to escape his lips.

Starvation, a most important feature in the Doctor's system of taming, the same as with the tiger-trainers, seemed to have no effect upon the patient.

After undergoing three days' confinement, without food, in a small chamber underneath the ground, the existence of which was not suspected by the local magistracy, he emerged, as calm, silent, grim as ever, and it was only necessary for the Doctor to catch the dangerous glitter in the blue eyes to know that the spirit of the man was unbroken.

Thenceforward the simple plan was followed of never leaving the patient with less than four—attendants they were called, but keepers they were in fact—to watch him, except when he was locked up alone in his vault for the night.

As the Doctor stood on the step, some one approached him from the entrance to the grounds which were kept for the asylum use. It was the stranger who had been in the drawing-room on the day that the Baronet had arrived at the snug residence.

He was clothed very differently now, and more in keeping with his brutal, ill-favored appearance. He was Doctor Borkwood's head-keeper, and his ruffianism was a shade less deep and heartless than his master's only because it was less

ed. The asylum, and the head-keeper, iron-bound door that led of the building. They provide passage to a handsome view of the inner quadrangle and its two wings,

It was laid out tastefully as a garden, and here several of the patients were airing and sunning themselves. Several apartments, well-furnished, well-lighted, and comfortable, opened into the hall, and two broad stone passages ran from it on either side.

The Doctor and his myrmidon passed through one or two of these apartments. The occupants were sitting about, childishly talking, some playing and laughing at the weak delusions of others, while unconscious of their own, and some even reading apart. But wherever the two inspecting ruffians went, a change took place—tones were hushed, and glances grew circumspect and trembling. The Doctor's great system was in full force here. The taming had been complete; and when the worthy magistrates took their periodical round, they had nothing to do but admire the implicit obedience and professed comfort and happiness of the patients as the result.

"How is *he* to-day, Royce?" asked the Doctor, as they were ascending a wide staircase, running from midway down one of the passages.

"Just about as usual, sir. Quieter maybe, but all the more dangerous for that. We've got 'im in the little room in the west wing, and Jim and the lot are with 'im."

"This is becoming a nuisance, Royce; they can't be dancing about him always. We shall have to break him in somehow."

"He's a-sittin' there quiet enough now—toc quiet for me. I reckon he's 'atchin' some mischief."

"I'll give him something else to sit quiet about," muttered the Doctor, showing his white teeth vindictively.

"The devil!—what's that?" exclaimed the head keeper, suddenly.

There was a fearful crash of window-glass, and a confused uproar of men's shouts and scuffling.

They had reached the upper landing now, and both rushed to a window overlooking the quadrangle.

A deep oath burst from the Doctor's lips.

"That's him!" roared the head keeper, pointing down into the quadrangle. "He's smashed the winder, and climbed down by the tree."

The crash had evidently come from one of the windows in the west wing, which was now paneless.

The branches of a big tree extended close to it, but it would require a very bold man to leap from the sill into them.

"I'll have that tree cut down!" cried the Doctor, as they hurried down the stairs again.

"Are all the outer doors locked, Royce?"

"Safe and sound, sir. Trust me for that."

"Then he's all right," growled the Doctor.

"Williams was arter 'im. He was in the quad at the time. He's nabbed 'im by now, most like."

"Sorry for Williams's good looks if he's tried it alone," muttered Doctor Borkwood to himself.

They were in the hall now, and rushed across it, and out into the quadrangle.

Away went Royce in the pursuit; but the Doctor stood calmly watching just outside.

"Is that mill going?" he asked of a keeper, who ran out past him.

"Hard at it!" returned the man.

It was at once apparent why the Doctor felt no uneasiness. The wings of the asylum projected to within a dozen feet of the mill-stream, and from them extended a wall, full fifteen feet high, into the water itself. Quite unscalable was this flat surface of brick and mortar, excepting with proper appliances, as had been proved in but too many instances. The mill-stream itself thus formed the fourth and by far the most formidable side of the quadrangle, for any one trusting himself to its rushing, boiling waters, speedily found a terrible death in the mill-machinery below.

The patient who was attempting to escape was the man who had been entrapped nearly a month ago—Sir Ralph Grimspeith. They had got him at bay now, against the wall near the

mill-stream, and five or six keepers were close around him. But not one of them dared to be the first to lay hands on him, for two of their number had already gone down, disabled, beneath those terrible blows straight from the shoulder.

Again he broke through their ring, and dodged them right and left, running round the quadrangle seeking some outlet. One of them in his path he mowed down with a blow of his fist, as if it had been a sword. His eyes blazed scornfully at them, and on his livid features was a grim, set expression, that chilled them at the heart as they faced him.

Suddenly a thick set, sturdy man leaped on him, and seized him round the middle.

It was Royce.

For an instant a fearful struggle ensued—so furious, so sharp, that not a keeper had a chance of striking in.

"Now, then, you've got him!" roared the Doctor.

Every window was almost crammed with faces, and every watcher held his breath.

Quick gasping—the jerking about of arms and legs—one glimpse of the terrible, pitiless look on the Baronet's face, that had been there years ago before the waters of Como; a desperate wrench, and then a man flung with a giant strength against the stone-faced building. Those who witnessed this stood transfixed for a minute.

But at once the hunted man had bounded away, and was facing the stream.

His pursuers had no care to follow him; the fearful fate of the head keeper had its effect.

"Stop!" he exclaimed to them, opening his mouth to speak for the first time in weeks. "I'll sell my life dear! The first man that touches me I'll pitch him into that flood! If I can't do it, we'll both go in together."

He didn't shout; his tones were cold, ringing and clear; but there was a desperate man's resolve in them, and they paused.

There had been a loud ringing at the asylum bell during the last few minutes, but no one had attended to it.

Just then, however, a keeper placed a note in Doctor Borkwood's hands, as he stood, pale and trembling with anxiety and passion, at the top of the quadrangle.

"From a lady, sir. She's been waiting this half-hour, and is just outside now."

"Go to the—"

But he stopped short at the unusual appearance of a woman close beside him.

He knew her in a minute; the hunted man by the mill-stream knew her! He rushed wildly forward a dozen steps; his arms dropped by his side; his pursuers closed on him; he was a captured man—unresisting!

"Don't go to him, my lady! He is dangerous; he is in a terrible state of frenzy."

Not heeding the warning, she strode across the quadrangle toward the little group, her eyes flashing strangely, a slight foam flecking her lips, and her little white hands tightly clenched. His gaze was on her, and there was a curious soft expression in his eyes; but he was silent.

"Wait!" she said, authoritatively, to the keepers who were leading him away.

Then she went close up to him.

"It is my turn now! You would not spare him then; you would show him no mercy—him whom I loved! I would never have seen him again; would have made a good and true wife to you; but you were hard. I can be hard now. My revenge is sweet; it is better than yours; it is more lingering. How like you it?"

She spoke in Italian, and almost hissed her words. Her beautiful features were distorted with an expression almost demoniacal. He did not answer, but shook his head sadly, and all the fierce light fled from his haggard features.

"You are revenged, my Stephano!" she muttered, turning from him at length.

"What is this?" exclaimed Doctor Borkwood, hurrying up to her with the open letter

in his hand. "He has gone for the magistrates?"

"Yes; we must send him away," she returned, excitedly, "at once. They will release him."

But it was too late. The uniform of the constabulary were already visible in the hall. The keepers proceeded to hurry the captured man away, and he was quite passive in their hands now.

"Stay there!" cried some one at the upper end of the quadrangle. "Don't let any one go! Where's Doctor Borkwood? Doctor Borkwood, what does this mean?"

It was Mr. Harvey, the magistrate. He came forward, followed by Harold Forrester, Martin Rawle, and the sergeant and constables bringing up the rear.

"Bring that man back!" he exclaimed; and the keepers obeyed.

"He's highly dangerous, Mr. Harvey," put in the Doctor, following his usual system. "He's just broken loose. You see that poor fellow there," pointing to where some of the attendants were lifting the body of Royce, the head keeper, only to find life extinct; "the patient set upon him, and nearly killed him, if not quite."

"Indeed! I'll look into the case this time myself, Doctor Borkwood," the magistrate replied, coolly.

The Doctor was thunderstruck. Another failure of his system, for the magistrate did not show even the slightest signs of the usual magisterial timidity.

"Now, then, Mr. Forrester, what have you to say?" continued Mr. Harvey.

Harold came forward, and the Doctor grew very pale.

"That Sir Ralph Grimspeeth has been placed under the charge of Doctor Borkwood by a mistake. I believe him to be as sane as I am."

"It is false—false!" screamed a woman's voice behind.

"And who may this be?" inquired the magistrate, turning and surveying her calmly.

"Lady Grimspeeth," said Harold.

"Humph! The sorrowing and afflicted wife—eh?"

Although Mr. Harvey was only an English country gentleman of average intelligence, yet once on the track, he could go forward with considerable energy and common sense.

"Now, then, Sir Ralph Grimspeeth, will you inform me whether you consider yourself sane, and if—"

"Most improper way—" commenced Doctor Borkwood, hastily.

"Hush, hush! I am aware that it is not the method usual with the medical faculty, but for that reason it may be all the more effective. Now, Sir Ralph?"

"I believe myself to be as sane as any sane person present," returned the Baronet, quietly.

"Release him!" said the magistrate to the keepers.

Reluctantly they obeyed.

"I give you notice that I will not be responsible for the consequences, Mr. Harvey," said the Doctor, sulkily.

"No; but I will," was the quick reply, with a glance that showed the magistrate was fully awake at last. "There will have to be strict investigations, Doctor Borkwood, before—"

But he was interrupted by a strange, unearthly yell. It proceeded from the brink of the mill-stream, from which they were only distant some two dozen paces.

"My wife!—Leonora!—my love!" cried the Baronet, hoarsely.

She was standing over the rushing flood. She looked fearful; her beautiful tresses, which had come unloosened, streaming in the breeze, her features haggard, and her eyes blazing with a strange, delirious light. One instant she was seen thus, the horrid, wild laughter ringing out on their ears, then the space in air she had occupied was vacant.

Only for the time that they were fetching a breath, though, and then, with a bound, Sir

Ralph Grimspeeth, the injured but loving husband, filled her place.

He paused but to jerk off his coat—no suicide this, but a desperate attempt to save his love; and ere their shouts of horror had died away, he was gone.

They strained every nerve to stop the mill in time, though they knew it was useless.

He reached her, and they could see her arms wound round his neck; he struggled with Herculean efforts for a minute nearly, then was overborne.

They could see that he kissed her; they could see by the movement of his lips that he was whispering to her; but what his words were, those on earth can never know.

Locked in each others' arms, on they rushed down the boiling, frothing flood unto the wide, silent sea of eternity.

Revenged at last, Stephano!

A couple of hours later, when the water was drained off, their mangled remains were found. They were placed in one coffin, and buried in the family vault in the little church down at Grimspeeth.

Mr. Harvey's investigations were limited, for the owner of the asylum—the eminently respectable Doctor Borkwood—anticipated him by a well-timed flight. He took with him all his available treasure, and left a considerable amount of debts behind him. After that time, Milbury had no lunatic asylum to boast of.

Grimspeeth Hall and property were seized upon by the creditors of the late owner, and sold to defray his debts. When the new purchaser came to take possession, Martin Rawle was at once re-engaged as bailiff.

Mine host gave up his farm when his daughter Lucy married Harold Forrester; but he still keeps the lease of the "Silver Trout." On the winter evenings he is yet to be found in his corner by the big fire-place, jovial, as of old; and opposite sit big Farmer Jennings and Martin Rawle.

Harold Forrester is now a partner in the bank at Chilhampton. He has repurchased the estate once belonging to his father, and blessed with a loving wife, and two or three little Forresters, lives there very happily.

Pretty Mistress Lucy is as piquant as ever; a little more matronly, and rounder, perhaps; but not a whit less charming. On Sunday they frequently go over to the "Silver Trout," and spend the day with mine host.

Then, in the afternoon sunlight, Harold and she will wander quietly through the little churchyard, and into the picturesque church, and stand silently before a simple marble slab, let into the wall above all the monuments and escutcheons. As they gaze up at it side by side, she knows he has come there as a duty, for the one shadow on his life now is that sad past, wherewith it is connected. Only two names are inscribed on its pure, white surface, and below them the word "drowned," and a single date; but it tells all that is generally known of the fate of the Last of the Grimspeeths.

THE END.

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